

HEADLESS ANGEL

Also by
VICKI BAUM



GRAND HOTEL
RESULTS OF AN ACCIDENT
SECRET SENTENCE
HELENE
MARTIN'S SUMMER
FALLING STAR
MEN NEVER KNOW
CAREER
A TALE FROM BALI
NANKING ROAD
CENTRAL STORES
THE SHIP AND THE SHORE
GRAND OPERA
MARION ALIVE
BERLIN HOTEL
THE WEEPING WOOD

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**HEADLESS
ANGEL**



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With the exception of actual historical personages identified as such, the characters are entirely the product of the author's imagination and have no relation to any person in real life

PROLOGUE



NOW THAT September is blue and hazy upon the land, I like to walk up to my grave in the early afternoon and remain there until in the slanting sun the shadow of my tombstone grows long and lean and begins licking at the hem of my skirt All birds are suddenly very loud at that hour, and there is a great agitation and protesting in the bird world, as among children pleading for just one more game before their mothers pull them home to rest and sleep Then, when the first subtle pleasure of a first sunset shiver plucks at my shoulders, reminding me that it is time to give Poor Albert his medicine and his camomile tea, his foot bath and his hot compresses, I pull my shawl tighter, pack up my crocheting, secure my eyeglasses, lift Loro off his perch, lean on Coco, my ebony cane with the Negro-head handle, and contentedly take my way through the park back to the house That stone bench under the willow tree by the side of my grave has become my small, my very own, home within the rambling estate of Helgenhausen, there I can be alone, but never lonely, in the good company of my memories Of all the celebrated, the picturesque, the romantic showplaces in and around our Weimar, this is the quiet green refuge I like best Yes, whatever else may be said against Poor Albert's taste, he chose a fine spot to bury me in

It lies at the top of an unassuming elevation which Weimar elects to call a height, and which Albert, in some of his limp poems, even addresses as the lofty mountain from the peak of which he looks down, very much the philosopher, upon the shadowy glens and dales There, less poetic beings tend his cattle, plough his fields, or pitchfork his dung over the good brown earth of Helgenhausen I am well content to let him think and sing of my grave as another Parnassus, still, to me, who have crossed the Cordillera and lived in the wild mountain fastnesses of New Spain, our hill remains a hill, and a small one at that Just high enough to give me a view I love It turns its back on Weimar and lets me look out on a peaceful world of

pasture and field, of fruit trees wading down the slope up to their knees in lush green grass, farther down, in diminishing perspective, I can see small cattle grazing, a miniature shepherd whittling himself a new crock, a tiny sheep dog worrying the herd into line with an air of great importance and self-respect, there is a lazy little stream ribboning its way across the fertile green and golden satin of the pasture, and in the distance, where everything shrinks to toy size, the church steeple and brown shingle roofs of our village

To the south, at the far rim of my view, the contours of the Thuringian Forest melt blue and misty into the sky. Nearby, from behind some slender shrubs of laburnum, I can hear the thin trickle of our celebrated spring and see the outline of the small Greek temple with its copper cupola that for all these years has stoutly refused to cover itself with enough patina to look antique. That temple is where my domain ends and Albert's begins. For me the earthy satisfaction of well-cooked meals, of the milkhouse, the butter churn, the stables where calf and foal are born, and eggs, still warm, are hidden in the straw, for me the larder, the linen shelves, the fruit bins, and my proud strawberry beds, the richest in the whole duchy. For Albert those rarefied districts of the dilettante where he and his like don't ever walk but only stride, float, and soar.

In a small way my grave has become one of the sight-seeing places near Weimar, and quite often travellers round out with a visit to Helgenhausen their pilgrimage to the sacred sites where Goethe and Schiller lived. Usually Babette takes them over the grounds, shows them the upstairs bedroom where Goethe slept a few times, the beech tree in whose bark he once cut his initials, the spring with its trickle of greenish water over which a lichen-covered, ample-buttocked nymph keeps watch, and the tin cup from which Goethe is said to have drunk the spring water. This last is an open fraud, for Goethe was here for the last time in 1818, much too careful and ailing and old gentleman to drink of the questionable liquid, and, no doubt, Babette has furtively replaced the old tin cup with a new one at regular intervals in the twenty-two years since. Usually Babette culminates her guided tour by making station at my grave and reciting my obituary.

" and here you see the grave of Clarinda Countess Driesen, who drowned herself at the age of twenty-two years. Her inconsolable husband had the coffin with her remains

interred at this her favourite spot He himself designed the sepulchre and had it executed in genuine Carrara marble brought especially from Italy The poem on the tombstone is also by Count Driesen If you care to step up and read ”

*Here lies Clarinda Countess Driesen
 Born on the second day of December Anno 1778
 Died in March 1800
 Eternally mourned by her inconsolable husband*

The visitors comment, talk platitudes, read Poor Albert's ode, some do it with respect, some with sentimental sighs, some with sarcasm, for it is limping like a stump-legged veteran of Napoleon's Old Guard In it I am called

*An ethereal soul
 Unwilling to detain in the dark pit
 Of this all too earthly clay*

It claims that

*Holding his broken heart
 In her transfigured hands
 She enters silent the Elysian Fields*

And it uses profusely the most easily rhymed but least valid words of any language For ever And Never

When the sight-seers are through with my epitaph, they stand there for another moment, bareheaded, in a befitting silence Occasionally a hard-boiled cynic might remark “But was not there a rumour that the Countess actually did not drown herself but ran away with a lover and disappeared, did Clarinda ? If so—what a she-devil she must have been !” At which Babette will lower her eyes and answer gently “Oh no, monsieur”—(usually the cynic is a Frenchman)—“Clarinda was an angel ”

With this she takes her troop of sight-seers past me, past a most correct and inconspicuous old lady quietly enjoying the autumn sun, and her eyes wink at me and then travel mischievously from me to the angel bent over my grave It is a rather attractive angel, gracefully lifting a torch skyward in one hand while pouring with the other a flood of stiffly arrested marble

tears from a marble urn down upon the little mound, unfortunately, my pretty angel has lost its head Poor Albert assures me that the resemblance of its face to mine was truly remarkable However, during the stormy days of 1806, after the Battle of Jena, when Weimar was ransacked by Napoleon's soldiers, a platoon of them bivouacked in our park, used the angel's face as a target in a friendly contest of marksmanship, and blew it to pieces As for me, I am convinced that a headless angel is a much likelier portrait of myself than one who wouldn't have lost its head at one time or another

Poor Albert claims that he buried me here because it had always been my favourite spot and also the very place where he stole a first kiss from me and immediately afterward proposed marriage, well over forty-five years ago But this is just one of the legends with which Poor Albert likes to garland the flat landscape of his life If there ever was such a thing as a stolen kiss between us, it must have been of the anaemic kind that left no imprint whatsoever on my memory The truth is that my much older brother, tired of being my guardian and eager to be rid of me, suggested this marriage of convenience to Albert while they were out hunting together I don't think that Albert ever cared for the hunt, he went hunting because for a Count Driesen it was the thing to do, because our Duke of Saxony-Weimar was a passionate huntsman and everyone at Court went hunting, but most of all, because Goethe in his former years had also had his fill of wild rides and crazy hunting exploits I don't think that Albert made it ever clear to himself, but whatever Goethe had done, he wanted to do too Born twenty years after the greatest writer the German nation ever had, he was for ever trotting in Goethe's tracks like a panting, baying, breathless dog that can never hope to catch up with his master If Goethe, driven by the demonic unrest of his heart, made his escape from our small Court residence and ventured forth to Italy—Albert, too, went on a journey, albeit only to Dresden, if Goethe climbed the icy crags of Switzerland, Albert went and conquered the less formidable rocky formations near the Saxonian capital Like Goethe, he wanted to be a universal spirit, a worshipper of nature, a citizen of the world, an immortal poet, and a great lover But unlike Goethe, he always and in almost everything threw away the grain and kept the chaff Because Goethe had once suffered, strained, and gloried in his unhealthy, frustrated, and yet heavenly rich love

for Frau von Stein, Poor Albert also arranged for himself to nurse a poetic and platonic romance *Mademoiselle de Guermontagne*, the ivory-skinned, purposefully sentimental daughter of a French émigré, was a poetic and willing enough partner for their noble duets of sweet moonings and swoonings Even today I can't think of that bloodless bluestocking with the noisy eyes and the plaster-of-Paris heart without laughing about the unexpected end to my husband's eternal love

Certainly Poor Albert made a fool and an ape of himself with his silly Goethe-cult If Goethe wrote dramas, poems, novels—so tried Poor Albert, if Goethe wrote an epic like *Hermann und Dorothea*—Poor Albert would promptly throw himself into the conception of his interminable opus, *The Hesperides* In poetic disarray he would be sweating over his recalcitrant stanzas Shirt unbuttoned, thin red hair ruffled, snuff on the lapels of his housecoat, he would be sitting at his writing table and chewing on his quill, his eyes would absently be fastened on some invisible horizons, his aquiline nose be reddened and clogged up by his chronic cold, and the floor around him covered with wilted and discarded manuscript pages like the floor of a forest with fallen leaves after a storm When he was dictating to me he would gasp from time to time with the anguish of a fish cast on dry land, and I could foresee his next move as only wedded people know such things He would take some snuff, open his mouth, and wait hopefully for the explosive sneeze that would give relief to his poor nose but also streak his handkerchief with still another eruption of brown mucus and spatter his housecoat with more of the repulsive stuff There are, I think, some such creeping, insidious poisons in every marriage which, swallowed in minute daily doses, take their slow but deadly effect

Well, they are all dead and gone now—Goethe, Frau von Stein, and even the tough-fibred Annabelle de Guermontagne—and Albert is a man of seventy-one, a semi-invalid suffering from kidney colics And still he is working on *The Hesperides* and still he believes that all he needs is time enough to finish the twenty-third stanza, rewrite the seventh and ninth once more, change again the fourteenth, and find a publisher willing to print it—and then Poor Albert will at last be recognized as the one German writer to overshadow Goethe

It must be a terrible strain to be ambitious but unoriginal, to want to create and be barren Albert's virtues are all on the

negative side They consist of what he is not instead of what he is not a drunkard, not a woman chaser, not a man to pick fights or swear Not deceitful, not disloyal, not brutal, not vain When I was seventeen and my brother informed me that Count Driesen had chosen me for his wife I thought this mosaic of negative qualities admirable and I kept admiring them for several years after Later I often wondered why I had tumbled so willingly into this marriage But my reasons were sound and simple enough, I wanted to get away from my brother's domination and I did not know yet that a young girl could do anything but obey For Albert, getting married belonged in the same category with going on a hunt Probably he flinched every time he pulled the trigger of his shotgun or saw a dead partridge I positively know that he flinched at marriage, but it was the thing to do, and, furthermore, the lineage of the Driesens had to be preserved Poor Albert, he failed in that as he failed in so many respects And how often, when riding across our fields or enjoying the rich smell of freshly ploughed earth, I felt jealous of the nanny goats that were nibbling the short yellow winter grass along the Chaussee, each goat with her wobbly, black-faced kid at her side or hanging to her teats I envied the scraggly creatures bitterly, for every goat had a child and I had none

But these are past pains and by now I am laughing at myself as much as at Albert And what else may I do but laugh when I examine the sight I offer an old woman of sixty-two, perpetually infuriated by her own small stature and twisted spine, and therefore aggressively erect of carriage, skin wrinkled and just a bit pock-marked, but shiny like that of a glazed winter apple and with just a soupçon of rouge on my cheeks—the artful application of grease paint having been taught to me in the long ago by La Rosaura and now being a harmless little secret between old Babette and myself So well-bred, so primly dressed, so impeccably behaved a very old lady sunning herself on a bench in Helgenhausen Park A picture of dignity, mellow patience, and tranquil contentment, I'm sitting at my own grave and thinking of my lover who died a horrible death thirty years ago Indeed, what else may I do then but laugh?

Sometimes I sit motionless, listening into myself and trying to think this through to its final conclusion I am old What does it mean to be old? What sort of creature is this an old woman? Who am I, Clarinda? Old, yes, and yet still the

same as I ever was It is still all there, enclosed within me, complete like the tiny insect Goethe once showed me embedded in a clear piece of amber The child Clarinda, the well-bred daughter of landed gentry, the awkward Court debutante, the eager and ignorant bride, the dutiful wife, but also the bad woman, mistress of an adventurer, of a gambler and a scoundrel as some called him, the queen over a fantastic house with a silver threshold, and the ragged fugitive who almost perished at the roadside, the wild rebel and the humble penitent I am still all of it the one who ran away and the one who returned

Getting old is not a metamorphosis, it is an accumulation, a veritable rag-bag full of the odds and ends collected in a lifetime All the words are still there, all the tears, all the laughter, the mischief and the virtue, hopes and resignations, the dreams and the unfulfilled wishes, drifting shadows on a white wall The smells, the tastes, the sounds, the sights All the secrets are still there, caresses exchanged in the pit of the night, tenderness whispered into the darkness The farewells at dawn are there, voice of a morning bird, a leprous beggar's outstretched hand, proud rustle of my new satin robe, white flecks of foam on the flank of my lover's horse Nothing is ever lost or changed, not the voyage nor the wind in the sails, not the enormity of horrors and not the small sharp delights Sitting at my own grave, I can close my eyes and think Felipe—and my heart still stops at that thought and again I breathe the warm scent of his being close to me and trace again with my fingers the two scars on his shoulder blade and the fine dark hair that grew in the shape of a cross on his body, across his chest from nipple to nipple and straight down his middle where his muscles came together in a hard beautiful narrow groove And I can hear his soft laughter in the dark "You see, Caralinda, I'm a good Catholic, even when I'm in bed with thee "

And if a remembrance like this still makes me reverberate, what does it mean then an old woman? And if it is obscene for an old woman to harbour such memories, I can't help it and I don't care, and, furthermore, I suspect that such are the things many a grandmother remembers when she withdraws into herself with her benign cat's smile

Once, during his last year, Goethe said something to me which moved me deeply "To be aged means to be deprived of the great human right of being judged by one's equals" It sounded so utterly lonely Like the tower of an old cathedral

standing high above the roofs of the rudely bustling young town beneath, like the one single giant tree left of a forest cut down long ago I took his dry cool old-man's hand and nestled my cheek against it, as I had often done in my childhood It was a most unbefitting gesture for a woman well in her fifties, but I was not aware of that and neither was Goethe He only stroked my cheek and asked me gently "Do you ever regret, Clarinda, having returned to our narrow smug Town-of-the-Muses?"

"No, I do not," I answered, and, bristling somewhat, I added "But neither do I regret that I ran away"

"That is good," Goethe said contentedly, "that is good and in order and as it should be, Clarinda"

And that was the last time I saw my great friend

"Why don't you write your memoirs, Clarinda?" many people ask me "You had such unique experiences, you were familiar with so many celebrities You lived through the dawn of this, our unbelievable, exciting nineteenth century, why don't you put it all down on paper, Clarinda?" Indeed, sometimes I am afraid that the epidemic of memoir writing, which has seized not only Weimar but all Europe, could become contagious even for me But I am no historian I am a woman and I can remember only the things which seemed important to me as a woman To write memoirs you have to be a *voyeur*, you have to have stood at the banks and watched the river stream past—whereas I dived right in and swam along, with the current or against it, sometimes with my nose above the waters but more often with the waters above my nose It is true, I saw the New World break away from the Old and it was painful and bloody like any birth Also, and being first and last a woman, I remember that on that fateful day of the Guanajuato massacre I wore my new white dress and the bonnet with the cherry cluster, and, heaven knows, putting on that bonnet that day was just as valiant and defiant a thing to do as to die with the Spanish flag in one's hand

September, the sixteenth of September—maybe that is why I have thought all day long so much of my years in Mexico They are celebrating their independence, and I know so well what it will be like in Mexico today The church bells will peal at all hours, there will be flags and flowers and garlands, and the few highways and the countless mountain paths will be crowded with white-garbed Indios and Mestizos and with their

donkeys and their wives and their children, all loaded down with the various things, alive and dead, they will lug to market There will be much shouting and singing and stamping and dancing, cockfights and bullfights and fiestas everywhere, and the hot smell of chocolate and *guajolote con mole* and chiles and meat roasting and pulque spilled in the dust and charcoal fires There will be heated orations on the plazas, and serenades under balconies, and rockets exploding into the air, and fireworks burning their patterns into the sky at night There will be many drunk men and not a few killed ones, and many patient, resigned women dragging their men home, the quick and the dead alike I can hear the crowds and see them and smell them and, I believe, I can understand them now, today, when they are celebrating the thirteenth anniversary of the beginning of their fight for independence When it began I didn't understand much of it I was there, in the hot, bloody navel of it, and all I knew then was that Felipe died in it, with a sword in one hand and the Spanish flag in the other Now I know that he was fighting on the wrong side, for the wrong ideas—if there is such a thing as right or wrong sides, ever—but fighting and dying like a man Oh, Felipe, *mi amor, mi corazón*, Felipe

I must have said it aloud, for Loro rolls up the thin little membranes which cover his eyes when he is asleep and responds like a reliable old actor who has been waiting for his cue all the time He speaks to me in Felipe's voice, dear ghost voice from another world, he repeats the hot, impudent, caressing words he must have snatched up eternities ago when his silver cage was hanging in my bedroom How Felipe would laugh if he could hear the two of us converse in Spanish, in the intimate and shameless lovers' Spanish one could learn in La Rosaura's house What a heart-rending travesty of love this is a silly old parrot speaking to a silly old woman in her dead lover's voice And yet it is all that is left to me of the past the great sound of an ocean of passion preserved in the hard little sea shell of Loro's beak Come on, talk more, *véngase, pajarito, vengase, vengase, dime mas, dime que me quieres*

Te quiero, Caralinda, te quiero, siempre, siempre, siempre

How peaceful it is up here and how unthinkable such peace within and without would have seemed to us when we were young To people growing up in a period of war and revolution, all the tumult and insecurity seem natural If anyone

should have told us in 1800 that there would come years and years of peace and safe tranquillity, we wouldn't have believed it possible If anyone should tell the young people of today that their softly upholstered security must sometime come to an end and be blown asunder by other wars and other revolutions, they wouldn't believe it either Luckily, humanity is made of resilient stuff and adjusts itself to any and all conditions History is but a writing on water, a footprint on grass The surface of the water ripples and is smooth again, the grass blades bend and straighten up at once, and people go on living through every hell and heaven and come out the same as they were before I am a witness to that, for I have been in hell and in heaven and I know

All that remains then is but the echo of an echo *Háblame, pajarito, háblame del pasado, háblame del amor*

PART ONE

THE FIRST time I heard of Felipe was through my maid Babette, who dragged the news into my room and faithfully put it down at my feet, like a good retrieving dog eager to be patted

"There is a stranger in town"

"Well, what about it? Weimar is as full as an egg with strangers"

"Yes, but this one is different He is young and awfully handsome and—"

"All right, Babette, let's have it, then," I said, and put down my pen I knew that trying to stop Babette from telling a crisp new bit of gossip was as futile as trying to stop a waterfall in mid-air I am as well acquainted with Babette's weaknesses as she is with mine, and whatever small amount of information about life I received in my early years came from my chamber-maid, my faithful shadow, my little milk sister I've often been told how her mother, called the Large Babette, would hold Small Babette at one of her inexhaustible breasts and me at the other and how the two of us would suck the very life out of her, until at last we would fall asleep and let go like two baby leeches filled up to the bursting point I don't know what would have become of me without the two Babettes, for my mother died of a childbed fever before I was two weeks old Thus we two grew up together, and if I was naughty Babette got spanked and didn't even mind it Born ten full days before me, Babette always felt that she was to mother and protect me, nurse me, pamper me, scold me, and have charge of me in every respect But then, children born in the servants' quarters or on the streets of poverty seem so much older, wiser, and stronger than we who wetted our napkins in a crested cradle

Babette fell all over herself in her eagerness to be rid of her news "Well, this stranger I am talking about, he took lodgings at the White Swan, the best two rooms they could give him His travel nécessaire is of pure gold and he brought his own wash-basin, pitcher, and goblet along, they're small but of pure gold

also There is an escutcheon with a seven-crested coronet on them, Herr Schaffler says only the Kurfuerst of Saxonia is known to travel with an equipment like that Some people in town seem to think that this stranger must be a prince travelling incognito, or perchance even the King of Spain, but—”

“Is he a Spaniard then ?”

“That’s what they say ”

“And handsome ?”

“Handsome as Lucifer,” said Babette, searching for the one succinct word and—as I had to discover later on—unerringly finding it “So handsome it catches you at the throat ”

I couldn’t imagine such hectic reaction to male handsomeness and I tried to dismiss the whole matter as market-place gossip and nonsense

“If he were travelling incognito, he wouldn’t flaunt his crowned crest in everybody’s face Now run along, Babette, I have to keep my dairy book in order ”

Babette gave me a glance of utter reproach and went into my dressing room, where she began to rummage among my wardrobe while I returned to my household arithmetic “Did you see him yourself ?” I asked a little later

“Whom ? Herr Schaffler of the White Swan ?” Babette inquired innocently, just to make the asking harder for me

“No This stranger, this paragon of manly beauty who gave you palpitations Did you see him yourself or is it only hearsay ?”

Babette came back, bringing my old blue morning robe and the sewing box along, and settled herself on the window bench for a good spell of gossip “Indeed I saw him myself, and if he isn’t a king he surely looks like one Such proud bearing, such commanding eyes, and yet gracious and simple at the same time They say he drops louis d’ors for pourboires left and right, but, in spite of having a golden travel nécessaire, he dresses without any pomp, not much different from our own gentlemen at Court Just by accident I happened to stand in front of the White Swan the very moment he came out of the inn and I was so embarrassed, as Your Grace will imagine, that I curtsied to him And I declare, he smiled at me and bowed his head as though I were a lady You never saw such a smile in your life, it went through me like a hot knife through butter—”

"How's that?" I said, myself smiling about Babette's agitation. It always amazed me what phenomena any man brushing past my chambermaid could work on the circulation of her young blood.

"You never saw such teeth, Clarinda, of such a whiteness, like linen laid out in the sun to bleach" (When we were alone Babette still called me Clarinda as in our childhood, but she made a point of being very correct and decorous before others) "Such a blessed miracle of a smile—you never saw such perfect teeth."

"Maybe I have. On my dogs, for instance. Or on horses."

Babette disregarded this. "So he stops on the doorstep for a moment, and his servant comes out behind him and hands him an outlandish cloak and a small three-cornered Spanish hat with black tassels on it. He throws the cloak over his shoulders, and then you should have seen him! It was long and black—a cape, I would call it on a woman—but I never thought a cape could look so good on a man, and right away I thought This will interest Clarinda."

"And why should it, particularly?"

"Because you are curious as a magpie and because you are bored, whether you know it or not, and because there are no men worth speaking of in Weimar."

Babette's sweeping judgment of our men made me laugh, here we were, the New Athens, the cultural centre of Europe, the place where congregated the greatest spirits of the times, assembled by our Duke and his mother with the true collector's zest, every specimen a world celebrity, an immortal—but, to my chambermaid, not worth speaking of. "How can you say such a stupid thing, Babette! Why, there is Wieland, Herder, our great Herr von Kotzebue—and the Humboldt brothers who are always in and out on visits—not to mention Herr Hofrath Schiller, and our own great Goethe——"

"I was speaking of *men*," Babette said pointedly, and I waxed angry.

"Certainly, you won't maintain that the Herr Geheimnder Rath Goethe be no man——"

"They say he was quite a good rooster in his time," Babette said, there was not a grain of respect or refinement in that simple creature, and maybe that is what made her such a refreshing companion for me who was constantly smothered with respect and refinement. "But look at him now," she

went on, "oldish and sickish and getting fatter every day You know what, Clarinda ? Weimar is run by the ladies , it's just a hen house full of gobble-gabble and the men are of no account Whereas this stranger——"

"Are you still at it ?"

"Wait now and let me first tell you about this servant of his It's the strangest-looking creature you ever saw He doesn't wear a livery but is garbed in a tight jacket and long tight trousers, all made of black leather , they are buttoned down from his hips to his knees so snugly that there is very little guessing left about his build , so many silver buttons, no one has the time to count them all, and silver embroidery on his jacket, and silver epaulets on his shoulders, and silver spurs like for a giant—made of pounds and pounds of silver so that he jingles and jangles with every step And this servant, too, has white teeth, but he doesn't smile at all, such a dignity as one has never seen I tried to speak to him, but he acted as if he hadn't noticed me at all, it made me feel like a flea Besides, he doesn't seem to understand any Christian language Herr Schaffler tends to think that he must come from the Americas An Indio, in other words——"

"You mean a redskin ? Here, in Weimar ? Just imagine !"

"Well, as for his skin, I'd rather call it green , pock-marked, too You mustn't think that I tried to talk to him because his appearance appealed to me Only because I knew you'd want me to tell you everything that's going on in town My poor little Clarinda, sitting day in, day out, in Helgenhausen while the Count goes off to Jena gallivanting with his French amour——"

"The count isn't gallivanting, Babette The Count isn't the gallivanting kind, as we both know——"

"Well, whatever it is he is doing in Jena with this hatrack of a French émigrée, the only diversion he offers you is permitting you to keep the dust off his cursed sacred writing table If I were you——"

"Babette, if she wants to let her impudent snout run away with her," I said, applying the severe third person singular, "I'll have to send her to work in the laundry "

"Yes, Your Grace I humbly beg your kindly forgiveness, Your Grace I won't say another word "

She didn't, and her pointed silence made me feel after a while as though an army of ants were marching across my shoulders

"Look here," I explained sensibly, "the Count is a philosopher and a poet and he needs inspiration. Naturally, he can't get it from me or from Helgenhausen——"

"Why would that be so natural?"

"Because we are married. Because—— Oh, what's the use! These are higher things which you wouldn't understand," I said, getting confused. I had been taught that marriage was like that. Marriage wasn't designed to be a lofty eyrie of inspiration from which a man might rise and soar in high and higher flight. To expect, demand, or receive such things from one's wedded wife would not only have appeared unfashionable but almost indecent. At home a husband had his bed and table, his stove, his pipe, his bedroom slippers, his pot de chambre, and his wife. Whatever else our men's souls and bodies desired, they searched for and found away from hearth and home in other women. As for my own husband, there was something else at the core of it, although I wouldn't have known then how to put it into words, nor even into a clear thought what he possessed he could not cherish, only the unattainable, the evanescent, the eternally retreating, was worth being loved, adored, and sung about. Mademoiselle de Guermontagne with her sharp little French mind understood this very well and arranged her behaviour accordingly. I was not jealous of her, to tell the truth, I regarded Albert's frequent trips to Jena as so many comfortable vacations from his fussy and exacting presence.

"I bet he dances like an archangel," Babette remarked into my unformed musings.

"Yes, the Count is a fair dancer."

"Who's talking about His Grace! Our stranger, of course!"

"It is your stranger, not ours. Moreover, archangels are not given to dancing."

"There——" said Babette, fluffing up the little lace collar she had sewn to my morning robe. "Anything else Your Grace may wish at present?"

"No, thank you. That is—I dropped a button from my chemise. Will you look for it?"

Babette dived under the bed and this gave me an opportunity to address my nonchalant next inquiry to her nicely rounded posterior. "What did you say his name was?"

I could hear Babette chuckle down there at the floor. At last I had taken the bait, I was a fool about dancing, and the stiff,

official Court balls and infrequent redoutes and masquerades had only whetted my appetite without ever giving me anything even faintly approaching satisfaction. I suspected that some of Babette's relentless if sympathetic manner of treating me had its cause in the fact that she shared with me my one and only secret several months before my wedding I had, for one unforgettable evening, sneaked out with her from my brother's estate Klein Werra near Kiliansroda, under the pretext of visiting Large Babette, who had retired to a hamlet several miles into the Buchfarter Forest. Instead of which the two of us, in proper disguise, had travelled by common post chaise to a little town called Otternfurt to see the fair and waltz to our hearts' content at the harvest dance. So far, this escapade in the style of the opera buffa, and the glimpse it gave me of the bold pleasures of the common people, had been the most wonderful, most exciting, most exhilarating experience of all my twenty-two years. Now that Babette had mentioned dancing, I became restless, and while I sat there gazing down at Babette's neat round derrière, enticing visions of all my undanced dances whirled before my eyes. At last Babette bobbed up from under the bed, with the button in her hand, eyes sparkling with the fun of having won out over me.

"So you want to know his name? I shall try to tell it to you, although it is a name very difficult to keep in mind and complicated to pronounce," she said teasingly. Very clearly do I remember her, kneeling in front of me and solemnly announcing the name that was to become my fate and destiny.

"It is not as though we had ever had a real Spaniard in town before and, mind you, this one appears to be what they call a Spanish grandee. You will see that his name sounds like a song, Clarinda. His full name, then, appears to be José María Felipe Contreras Conde de las Fuentes."

Once, before my official presentation at Court, I had involuntarily overheard a conversation between my brother and his wife while I was pruning roses under the living-room windows of Klein Werra. "Our Clarinda," he had said in his dry, sober, precise voice, "our Clarinda is neither pretty nor brilliant, and I am afraid she will cut a poor figure compared with the talented and divinely attractive ladies at Court. The only qualities she has to offer are her youth and her innocence. Therefore I recommend the simplest of gowns, no jewellery, no

perfumes, no powder, no pretensions of any kind Only if she looks modest, simple, unspoiled, can we hope not to discourage any of the men who may make her a suitable husband, unfortunately, the dowry our father left for her is small—still, one of the younger sons of one of our landed families might be satisfied to become our kinsman Or a widower like Freiherr von Kiesel, who needs a mother for his brood and is a rather witless fellow himself who can't make great demands ”

It was enough to make the roses look less red, the lawn less green, and the sky above less blue, I had dropped my pruning shears and run away, leaving under that window the shattered pieces of my fragile self-assurance Thus I had entered society as a frightened, mouselike wallflower and I remained one until that all-deciding evening in Goethe's house

It was one of the rare big Saturday receptions, and I dreaded such literary gatherings even more than the merely social ones at Court Among all these beautiful souls, polished to their highest shine and sparkle, I felt myself unbearably dull and without lustre Most of the ladies seemed greatly in love with themselves and with their own precious little mannerisms and affectations, whereas I was deeply disgusted with my looks, my personality, and my slowmindedness Of course I had occasional flashes of brighter moments when I was not certain whether all these beautiful souls were as admirable as they thought, or weren't they, perchance, a little ridiculous at times ? The men, too, seemed stilted and unnatural, I couldn't help thinking that they had laboured hard at home, carefully preparing and thinking up all these fireworks of witty aphorisms, wise observations, and philosophic footnotes which they scattered around with such a strainedly casual air of improvisation Even Goethe, my dead father's and my own old friend Goethe, appeared strangely unfamiliar and transformed at such occasions Very polite, but with a cool and distant formality, he moved among his guests, it was hard to believe that this stiff, heavy-jowled, ageing man could be the same gay, agile one who had played hide-and-seek with me when I was a little girl, who had helped me more than once to undress my dolls and put them to bed, and who had been as highly entertained and absorbed by the game as if he were a child himself Only for one fleeting second something like a mischievous little message found its way from him to me, that was when I pressed my lips together and dilated my nostrils in a desperate effort not to

yawn as Albert launched into the reading of the second stanza of his *Hesperides* I knew this stanza—and all the others—by heart, first, second, and third version, for not only had I nursed Poor Albert with elderberry soup, mulled wine, and various cathartics in all his labour pains, and midwifed him patiently through one hexameter after the other, but he had also made me copy it on fine vellum paper as a birthday gift for his Mademoiselle de Guermontagne On this night of his glory the mademoiselle had come from Jena and occupied now a seat of honour, for all Weimar respected her as the muse who had inspired Albert into writing—or at least beginning to write—his epic in twenty-four stanzas Her eyes fastened upon some invisible heavens above, and at intervals dabbing them with a lace handkerchief as if to hide unbidden tears, she sat there, harvesting all the little gasps of “Ah!” and “Oh!” as her due tribute I must admit, though, that she looked handsome enough, white-skinned and graceful, a Grecian statue in the new French style, and with that certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* which Weimar could never hope to achieve As for me, I kept myself in the shadow and tried not to yawn Goethe had followed Albert’s recital with polite interest, although his hexameters didn’t go too well with his perpetually clogged-up nose, and every one of them seemed to creep along on as many feet as a caterpillar A few times Goethe changed his position and at last, shading his eyes from the light of a nearby lamp, he rested his head in his hand, seemingly deeply engrossed in Albert’s epic But as I stifled my yawn I saw with a little shock that behind that hand he was grinning at me with an urchin’s grin, as if the whole exhibition were a joke only the two of us understood His large dark eyes were directed straight at me and then, slowly, his right lid closed in an impudent wink

Sometimes Loro winks at me like that and it always makes me wonder whether by any chance my old parrot might comprehend what he is saying to me and understand the full meaning of the naughty love words he picked up in my bedroom in Guanaxuato

At last the stanzas came to an end and the ladies pressed around Albert in a fluttering white muslin cloud to pay him the preposterous compliments which were the fashion among our literati, ours was a society based on mutual worship and copious reciprocal incense-burning, and no flattery was gross

enough not to be believed I am saying this today as I look back at it from the unmeasurable distance which time and life have put between the Then and the Now But that evening I was still straining every bit of my brain to live up to the spiritual splendour of it all and feeling fairly squashed with my own insignificance As usual I wore my bridal gown which Babette had frequently altered to make it appear like a new and different thing for different occasions I don't think that our guileless little tricks—this month a row of violet velvet bows down the front, and next an apple-green sash around the high waist—deceived anyone, but the small revenues of Helgenhausen did not permit me to spend money on fashions For that matter, nobody in Weimar had money, and that included our Sovereign, too It was not the surface and appearance that counted here, but only the deep and beautiful emotions everyone knew how to express in a constant flow of poems, water colours, and sentimental songs

Quick, hard little shuttlecocks of conversation whizzed past me, too high over my head for me to catch any of them and to take part in the game One talked about last January's opening performance of Voltaire's *Mahomet* in our theatre, of mesmerism, of Mr Benjamin Franklin's miracle called electricity, a dull line by Rousseau was quoted, an impertinently cynical one by Voltaire, one gossiped about our divine Corona Schroeter, about Madame de Staël, one criticized the latest issue of the *Horen*, or the second edition of *Hermann und Dorothea*, one blithely discussed matters which were completely beyond my comprehension, such as Kant's *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, Doktor Gall's new science of phrenology, Linnaeus's ideas about prolepsis, Vicq d'Azyr's *Traité d'anatomie*, and then there came some Spinoza, some new anecdote about Cagliostro, and Rousseau again It was indeed a symposium of selected knowledge and higher learning from which I was left out completely, but looking back on it, I often have to smile about all the important things which Weimar did not know and which did not interest our New Athens All around us the world was shaking with the catastrophes of the immediate past and the immediate future, but we in Weimar were sitting snugly and smugly on our little island of personal safety and did not care a tinker's damn for the rest of the world A distant occurrence, like the French Revolution, for instance, would cause only a ripple, whereas the question of who was or

was not to be invited to Duchess Amalia's Friday evening would create a storm

That Saturday an exceptionally large crowd was assembled in the main reception room from whose corner the enormous head of Juno Ludovisi gazed out upon the assemblage with a sightless expression of disdain and boredom Servants appeared now to offer refreshments, and I had a faint vision of the Demoiselle Vulpius, Goethe's vulgar little bed companion and mistress, who was responsible for the flawless perfection of this kingly household and yet had to keep herself invisible whenever ladies were present The servants had opened the windows, and the evening air streamed cool and moist from the dark Frauenplan As I stood there, half hidden by the draperies, a bit forlorn, a bit chilled, something strange happened Something very hot touched lightly on my shoulder, it was a burning sensation, as if the oil of a lamp or the hot wax of a candle had dropped on it I looked up, but there was neither lamp nor candle near me Instinctively my hand went to the spot where I still felt the burning that pierced into me like a fine hot needle Like a hot knife through butter, I remembered all of a sudden, and pulled my muslin shawl up to my chin in hasty defence Even before I turned around I knew what it was that had touched me

The stranger had entered, he stood at the opposite end of the room and looked at me He looked at me across the entire length of the crowded room, he looked at no one else among all the people but me At his side stood Goethe, talking to him with greater animation than he had shown all evening long The stranger was dressed in a black coat, black satin breeches, and an embroidered waistcoat, with finely pleated white linen ruffling out from his neck and cuffs, and he also wore his dress sword as though this were an official reception at Court Unlike most of our gentlemen, however, he wore no star or decoration of any kind, his left, very slender, very long hand rested leisurely on the sword grip He stood there, tall and with a looseness in his shoulders which I had never seen in any of our gentlemen, and he nodded polite assent to Goethe's animated remarks But his eyes remained fastened on me with an expression too alien for me to understand Nothing of the smile that had thrown Babette into such fits, no curiosity, nothing in the least ingratiating If anything, there was insolence in those eyes and an arrogance bordering on pity

What amazed me was the colour of those eyes, for naturally I had taken it for granted that a Spanish grandee would be black-eyed and raven-haired. But these eyes were of a deep metallic blue, long and oblique, as though pressed upward in the outer corners by the high cheekbones. Beneath these bones the cheeks were lean and filled with shadows which somehow gave the elongated face a hungry, dissatisfied look. His hair grew with a sharp point into his forehead but was severely brushed back in two high arcs and was fashioned somewhat unbelievably of the same deep blue metal as his eyes. I did not know what to make of it, for it did not appear to be a wig, and yet such hair did not exist.

It is remarkable how many details a young woman can absorb about a man in one first glance. "Close your mouth and don't gape so, you little goose," someone said to me, it was my sister-in-law brushing past me, and I quickly grabbed control of my countenance. There was now a little surge away from Albert toward Goethe and his new guest. A preposterous woman, topped by a bloated, aurora-coloured turban, bubbled up to me and put her arm in mine.

I don't know whoever nicknamed the wife of my husband's second cousin the Montgolfière, but it was appropriate and stuck to her. Baroness Cornelia Braunfels was always dressed in billowing, flowing garments and, like Monsieur Montgolfier's flying apparatus, she was filled with heated air which seemed to be just on the verge of lifting her off the ground. Her head was always thrown back while the rest of her surged ahead, blown along by the gales of some newly acquired enthusiasm. And now I detected the hungry gleam of a new inspiration in her purple-flushed face. "Come, Cara, let's meet the interesting new addition to our circle, high Spanish nobility and a world traveller to boot. How truly cosmopolitan our Weimar has become, thanks to the fame of our dear Geheimer Rath!" she gushed, and wanted to pull me with her. But I felt suddenly so cold that the inside of my throat ached and goose-pimples stood up all over my arms. I freed myself from the Montgolfière and withdrew still deeper into my corner. "What is the matter, Carissima? Don't you want that fascinating Spaniard to be introduced to you?" Cornelia asked me, and as I shook my head, desperately aware of my shyness which made it absolutely impossible for me to face the stranger, she gave me a little slap with her fan, dropped me as

ballast, and sailed enterprisingly away to the group at the other end of the room.

A few minutes later the servants cleared away the empty glasses and teacups and closed the windows, and Goethe stepped into the centre of the salon to announce that now our lovely and beloved Demoiselle Riedel was going to make us a gift of her voice and talent by singing for us some of his admirable friend's, Karl Friedrich Zelter's, new songs and that the demoiselle could probably be persuaded to render afterward one or the other aria from *Cosa Rara*. There was a whisper of delight and some handclapping as Goethe himself led the demoiselle to the slender, wing-shaped piano where a meagre individual was already expectantly rustling with the music, and the concert took its merciless course.

To be completely and disgracefully unmusical is but one of my failings, I could never carry a tune or remember a melody, nor enjoy Herr Zelter's compositions. This latter was considered a great shortcoming in the Weimar of that time, and I tried with questionable success to cover it up. Ordinarily I could force myself to sit still and pretend to enjoy listening to operatic arias for a reasonable time. But that evening I was too restless, I couldn't keep my hands or my feet quiet, nor my thoughts from wandering astray. I had lost the stranger from my sight and, without turning round, I knew that he was not standing behind me, either. With an unreasonable urgency I wondered where he had gone. Demoiselle Riedel had too big a voice for the room, she had a bosom like a blacksmith's heaving bellows, and there was altogether too much of her overpowering stage personality, after a while, and as aria followed aria, I couldn't stand it any longer. Fortunately I was near the door and bit by bit I arranged to shove myself out of the Juno Room and past some small groups of men who seemed to feel about opera and Demoiselle Riedel just as I did.

I don't know what instinct helps male and female animals find each other in the wide, dark forests of their mating seasons, but it must be the same polaric force which led me then away from the official realms of the reception rooms and downstairs into the quiet rear of the house where Goethe had his small secluded study. Its door stood ajar and from inside I could hear Goethe intently talking in French to someone—and so our host, too, had run out on our beloved Demoiselle Riedel's performance! I hesitated at that open door because I did not

dare pass it, and I smiled to myself as I heard Goethe stumble and grope for some French expression. I saw his hand reach out and take a book from a shelf, probably a French dictionary I myself spoke the language considerably better than our Geheimder Rath, yet I did not comprehend any of the conversation after he had found the missing word and went on “ you mean to say, then, that in those parts of Mexico igneous rocks or andesites appear in the form of—of—*Schlotfuellungen*—I’m sorry, but my French is really abominable—let’s call them for want of a better word volcanic cores I assume that the magma which intruded during the mountain-building periods into the folded limestone strata tended to carry the ores up from the depths and—Come in, little honeybear, and meet the Conde de las Fuentes This, Conde, is my dear friend, Clarinda Driesen, I am certain she will be good enough to help us out by acting as our interpreter ”

I had forgotten that Goethe’s wide-open, large eyes had an uncanny gift of seeing and perceiving everything, he must have noticed my shadow falling across the threshold and, without interrupting his discourse, he had stretched out his hand and swept me into the room, and there I stood now, mute and dumbfounded like a twelve-year-old caught stealing sweets The stranger had got up and bowed lightly “ I’m at your feet, mademoiselle,” he said, and it sounded very Spanish, even in French He said it with a perfunctory galanterie, as if his eyes had never singled me out of a crowd and dropped hot wax upon my bare shoulders, and he spoke the language of the courts and the diplomats with a harsh accent that made it sound fresh and new

“ Our friend here was telling me about the truly fantastic riches which are found in the mountains of New Spain,” Goethe said, pulling me down on a chair and keeping my hand in his The stranger sat down again, and with me between the two men, the three of us formed a tight group around the table of the small, simple room “ And more than only telling about it, he brought me these princely gifts for my mineral collection,” Goethe went on, and he was a different person from the stiffly polite courtier who had greeted the guests in the representative realms of the front rooms, he was agile now, lively, quivering with interest, and the familiar little bonfires of curiosity were burning in his eyes He let go of my hand to fondle a few rocks and crystals spread out on the table

"Look here, Clarinda," he said eagerly, "look at these Have you ever seen amethyst and topaz still in their—their—*Urform*? Still asleep in the quartz? And these druses, a miracle, to me every crystal an ever-renewed miracle! We will have to give these messengers from the mountains of a foreign continent a place of honour in our modest little mineral collection And here—look, little honeybear—here we have some rich silver ore, yes, these grey lumps are ore, this raw stuff may end up as a trinket on some little damsel's bosom But I interrupted you, Conde Where did you say this ore was found?"

"In my own mine, La Ramita, near Guanaxuato However, many people believe that the great Veta Madre of our district and the lode of Zacatecas are only different parts of one and the same enormous vein Your Excellency, I am firmly convinced that this veta, this lode, stretches like a spine of silver through the body of northern Mexico, all the way from Guanaxuato to Zacatecas, even farther, perhaps Yes, of this I am convinced, and I will prove it It is nothing but a question of sinking deeper shafts than anyone ever dared before And I will sink those shafts I will, if no one else "

"And what, may I ask, prevented your countrymen from sinking such shafts in the past?" Goethe asked, smiling

"But—the Mexicans, Your Excellency! Our labourers have not the valour nor the intelligence of the men working in the mines of Saxony! These Indios and Mestizos have no sense, no reason, they are hardly better than animals You can't imagine, Your Excellency, what difficulties the owner of La Valenciana has in sinking a shaft down to a depth of eighteen hundred feet, and he is the most powerful man in the whole province and his mine is the richest in the whole world"

At that Goethe laughed out loud "But, my dear Conde," he said, "you seem to hold our German miners in much too high an esteem, why, our deepest shaft in Freyberg, if I am not mistaken, does not go beyond a depth of two hundred and twenty feet, to sink a shaft eighteen hundred feet deep seems an almost unbelievably daring feat of engineering"

There appeared a stubborn expression on the Conde's face as he said "All the same, Your Excellency, there is no comparison between our miners and yours But I am afraid all this must be murderously boring for Mademoiselle"

I had neither spoken nor comprehended a word yet, all I could do was shake my head and try to keep my eyes away

from the Conde's blue hair and his long Spanish hands and his finely chiselled knees and the sculpturing of his legs Perfect beauty is something rare in men, and this, my first encounter with it, hit me with an impact from which I have not completely recovered even today Goethe smilingly patted my hand and dropped it then, to take up one of the rocks once more

"Oh no, I'm almost certain that the Countess is much less bored with us than she would be listening to the concert Am I right, little honeybear ?"

"Yes," I said, unaware of my own rudeness I cleared my throat "Indeed," I said

"There is much ignorance, lack of machinery, also the difficulty of transport," the Conde went on, apparently hardly aware of my presence "I wish it were possible to import some machinery as it is used in your mines But even if I should succeed, by fair means or by foul, to smuggle some parts of machinery into Vera Cruz, they still would have to be carried many hundreds of leagues, from the Gulf of Mexico across mountains and rivers and mired roads and desert plains, far to the north I assure Your Excellency, there is an unbelievable difficulty to every enterprise in Mexico But I will sink that shaft, I will sink it as deep as it may be necessary, and I will prove that there are richer veins in our mountains than anyone ever dreamed of," the Conde said—and that was the first time I saw in his beautiful face the obsession and fierce stubbornness which later was to become a part and perpetual companion of my life Goethe, who drew away from anything fanatical or unbridled (perhaps because it had cost him so much to bridle his own tempestuous heart and mind), shook his head in an almost unnoticeable protest Luckily, a servant entering at that moment with a bottle and two glasses on a tray distracted his attention "Let's have a glass for the Countess too, Karl," Goethe said, and took the bottle from him to fill the glasses himself By the manner in which he did it, with respectful, almost caressing hands, I knew that he wanted to honour his visitor with some choice vintage

"Now let's welcome our guest, Clarinda I hope this fiery compatriot of yours will be to your liking, Conde," Goethe said, lifting his glass and letting the light of his reading lamp shine through the ruby of the liquid "It's a Spanish wine, Valdepeñas My gracious lord, our Duke, in his great kindness

sent it to me as a restorative when my health was failing me last autumn Well, here is good luck for all your plans !”

“*Salud*,” the Conde said, looking at me over the rim of his glass “*Salud, amor y dinero*,” he said, and there came and went the smile Babette had spoken about “*A votre santé*,” I said, and drank The wine was sweet and heavy, full-bodied, with the fierce heat of the Southern sun in it My brother had taught me some understanding of wines, or Goethe would not have given me the distinction of inviting me to share this bottle with him and the stranger Suddenly I felt proud of being admitted to their company, I loosened up, and I was not shy any longer Indeed, the wine of Spain had restorative powers

“We have to put our best foot foremost, little honeybear, for our friend here came sailing from distant Mexico all across the Atlantic for the specific purpose of studying European mining methods, mainly those of the Bohemian and Saxonian silver mines,” Goethe explained

“That is, I arrived from Mexico, and I own a mine there, mademoiselle—but, please, you must not think that I am a Mexican, Your Excellency, I was born in Spain,” the Conde said quickly and emphatically, even bending forward in his eagerness to address himself past me to Goethe At last I found something to say too “Does that make so much difference ? Spain, or New Spain—to me the one sounds as strange and picturesque as the other ”

“Oh, but mademoiselle, but Your Excellency, there is an enormous difference, there is an immeasurable difference between a Spaniard and a Criollo ! There is such a difference between one born in Spain and one born in Mexico as there is between—well, for instance, between a nobleman and a commoner in Weimar,” he said in an agitation out of all proportion Goethe chuckled over his wineglass “Not a very good example, my dear Conde, not a suitable example at all ! In Weimar, nobility doesn’t rate very high, in fact, a person who has not more to offer than an inherited title is frequently regarded as a nitwit and an ignoramus Here, the nobility of spirit, wit, and talent is the accepted currency—more or less accepted, let’s say Of course there are certain rules and forms of etiquette to be observed which exclude a commoner from various highly boring Court activities, but our Duke solves such complications in the simplest way, he gives a title to such men of talent as he wishes to be near him I myself was born a

commoner and received my title as a matter of—shall we say expediency? I can assure you, Conde, that not a few of us look upon our titles not as a distinction but almost as an insult. This might seem a bit strange to you, Conde de las Fuentes—but then, our Weimar Court is not the Escorial, although we, too, have our miniature camarilla."

It was an amiable but definite reprimand, made more so by the tiny emphasis with which Goethe addressed his guest by his full name and title, I felt myself blush for the Conde and wondered how he was going to receive the rebuke but if he had heard it at all, he gave no sign of it. He seemed absent for a moment, listening into himself, while the shadow of a wondering smile played around his compressed lips. At last he shook his head as if some buzzfly of a thought were annoying him and then he had chased it away and, lifting his glass, he said "Your health, mademoiselle, and the health of His Excellency!" He sounded happy and insouciant. And I, too, raised my glass and became rather exuberant, "*Salud,*" I ventured to say, and there was that smile again. It came and went on the Lucifer-face like lightning on a summer night. "The lady speaks Spanish?" he asked. "Oh no—but I should like to learn it," I answered in great confusion. "I shall teach it to you," he said seriously, making it sound not like a pleasantry but as though he meant it.

"Tell us how you found your country on your return from the Americas," Goethe said. "No doubt, you landed at Cádiz?"

"No, Your Excellency. I did not disembark in Spain. I have not set foot on Spanish soil for—oh, so many years," the Conde answered. There was a tightening of his mouth and the shadow in his lean cheeks deepened. Watch out, I thought, here is something that hurts this proud animal.

"Understandable. It is reported that conditions in Spain seem rather unsettled in spite of her peace treaty with France," said Goethe.

"Not more unsettled than usual, Your Excellency. Spain is a country of unsettled conditions, and this peace resembles war as much as one drop of water the other. But, *malgré tout*, Spain is a wonderful country, Your Excellency, you ought to visit it."

"Yes, I ought to," said Goethe, getting up. "And maybe I shall. In the meantime my good friend Humboldt is travelling

through your wonderful country, Conde, and I asked him to lend me his eyes and let me partake of his journey Only last week I had a most interesting letter from him Look here," he said, pointing to a map that was tacked to the door, "here we have a little surprise for you Yes, here you can find your country—on my humble walls ! I tacked it up there myself, so as to be able to accompany Humboldt step by step "

"*De veras?*" the Spaniard said, more to himself than to his host "True—the Peninsula " Impetuously he jumped up and closed the door to get a full view of the map, and then he stood there, tensely isolated from us, digging himself into whatever landscape he saw in that irregular yellow blotch of a country, with blue veins for rivers, red circles for towns, curdled black clouds finely shaded in for mountains and ranges, and here and there a tiny crown for a fortification "Here," he said, deeply absorbed, "here we have the meseta—the high table-land—both the Castiles—and Madrid, Madrid ! Of such a whiteness in all the burned browns and yellows of the country-side ! My father lives in Madrid And here Toledo ! *Dios mío*—Toledo ! And there are the Pyrenees where I was born—now let me see if I can find the Castillo de las Fuentes——"

If anyone should ask me today what sort of man Goethe was, I should answer "A very curious man, a man of such an intense curiosity as I have never known in anyone else His appetite for experience and information was boundless and his curiosity all-consuming In whatever came under his eyes—people, animals, plants, minerals—he lost himself with the same absorbed attention Even as a little girl I used to wonder Our great Goethe, and so curious ? And now he was again the Goethe who had played with my dolls, examined their dresses, counted the number of their petticoats, and made them talk and behave like real people He pulled me up from my chair and swept me to that door The Conde stepped politely back and thus I found myself again between the two men, Goethe in front of me and the stranger behind, pointing across my shoulder at certain spots on the map

"It isn't marked here, but this is where the castle of my father stands," he said "El Castillo de las Fuentes, near the town of Alquezar—such a small grey swallow's nest of a town pasted against the mountain-side, the Castillo stands on a cliff, it is very old, some of its walls are said to have been built during the reign of Alfonso the First And here, in this part of the

Pyrenees, is the monastery of San Esteban where I was sent to school. My mother had promised me to the Church even before I was born—but that turned out to have been a mistake. Madre mía, what wicked boys we seminarists were and how hard we made it for the good padres to pound some education into our skulls! San Esteban is built on a rock as though a hand had lifted it up towards the sky. La Mano de Dios, the common people call that rock. There is a gorge not far from San Esteban and deep down a wild mountain stream, like a green little worm. After each rain the stream came rushing over the boulders with such a noisiness that we could hear it in our Latin lesson and became as restless as a nest of hornets. I was very happy in San Esteban. But then I was sent far away, to quite a different part of Spain, to Toledo, to serve there as a novice at the monastery of San Capistrán. It is a good town, Toledo, a beautiful town of great age and culture, but there I suffered very much homesickness—”

Again the black-sleeved arm stretched across my shoulder and the long-fingered hand brushed past my cheek and pointed out Toledo. Goethe had listened as avidly as I to the monologue, for the stranger had spoken as a man recounting his childhood to himself only. Now he pulled in the reins.

“Some day I shall return to Spain. I shall return to the Castillo de las Fuentes,” he said, and there was the same stubborn ring as when he had said, “And I shall sink a deeper shaft than anyone ever dared.” Goethe asked a few more questions and the Conde gave polite and casual answers, but I hardly knew what they were speaking about, for I was seized by an attack of dizziness, entirely new to me. What had caused it and thrown me into a whirlpool of confusion was the Spaniard’s hand which had come to rest on my bare shoulder. He stood very close behind me and was pressing still closer, as if carried away by the memories he was reading from that map.

“If you don’t consider this too personal a question, I should like to know how you avoided becoming a priest and made yourself the owner of a Mexican silver mine instead,” Goethe asked with a fine trace of irony. “It seems such a remarkable change of pace.”

“Oh, that’s a most ordinary story, Your Excellency, it would probably sound better if I could tell it in my own language, but—*tiens*. Shortly after I had taken the first holy orders, it so happened that a small theatrical company arrived in Toledo

On the day of Corpus Christi I was ordered to take some students of our seminary to the theatre to give them the benefit of watching the performance of one of Calderon's autos sacramentales. However, I saw and heard nothing but a certain actress. Your Excellency, the temptations of San Antonio were as nothing compared with the temptations which tortured me from that day on. I confessed my sinful thoughts and visions, I did penance, I beat my chest, I prayed, and I punished my flesh till I drew blood—but it was all to no avail. I became as thin as a green stalk of asparagus and as pale as the walls of my cell, at last our abbot, a kind and understanding man, took pity on me and called me into his presence. 'My son,' he spoke to me, 'not every man is fitted for the priesthood, and it is better to weed out the unfit in time than to let them become a disgrace to the Church and our Holy Order. Now, my child, confess to me in all sincerity do you often think of women?'

"And in all sincerity I answered 'Yes, my Father I think of them all the time, by day and by night, in Mass and in prayer, I can think of nothing else but women.'

"Our abbot then promised that he would take the matter up with my mother, advise her to desist from her promise to the Church, and persuade her to let me choose my own calling. But I could not wait until all the necessary formalities would be arranged at their own snail's pace and I foresaw endless difficulties. The same night I broke out like a young stallion and ran away from San Capistrán—and what happened to me afterwards, that's another chapter.'

I felt his breath coming and going on my bare neck—cool, warm, cool, warm—as if the memories of his early temptations had excited him, but when Goethe turned away from the subject and asked a few other questions, the stranger proceeded to give out information in such an even and matter-of-fact tone that I called myself a fool and a little country goose. Yet, when I tried to slip out from the unseemly proximity, his hand held me back, with a gentle but definite pressure it held me back, as I had often held back the neck of a young horse to be broken in. Goethe, with his sensitive nerves, seemed to feel something of the silent turmoil into which I had been tumbled. He turned away from the map, and the Conde released me at once, with such an air of innocence that I was certain he had touched me only by accident and that my heated imagination

was making something out of nothing So far, I had not known that I possessed an imagination of my own, for my regrettable lack of it had been pointed out to me again and again by my husband I began to be proud of myself Not only could I get dizzy and almost drop in a faint like any of our most beautiful spirits, but now I had even got myself an imagination

In the meantime, Goethe and the Conde were back at the mines “ you may well claim that the amalgamation process was known in Mexico almost two hundred years before Herr von Born invented, or rather rediscovered it, for our parts of Europe,” I heard Goethe say “ However, I seem to remember a remark in Agricola’s *De Re Metallica*, according to which a German introduced the use of mercury in the Guadalcana mines as early as the middle of the sixteenth century ”

“ Far be it from me to doubt the technical ingenuity and superiority of your nation, Your Excellency It is precisely for that reason that I came to your country for my studies I was only referring to our so-called patio process, although I understand that the German ores are too rebellious for it ”

And now there was no mistake about it I was back in my chair and he was standing behind it and his left knee came forward and touched my right thigh with such a shameless urgency as I had never believed possible, at the same time he went on talking fluently about his subject “ I studied Señor de Rio’s *Manual of Oricognosy* which acquainted me with the principles of the mining methods of Freyberg,” he said, and his hand stole down my arm and came to rest on the skin of my back, between my shawl and my low-cut satin gown “ an obsolete process in which corrosive sublimate, verdigris, and salt were applied, instead of mercury and copper salts,” he explained, and now he began stroking my naked shoulder in a manner that made me sizzle like oil spilled on a hot stove “

I think it was Vanoccio Biringuccio, who described this for the first time in a booklet published in Venice,” he reported, and his face remained so unmoved, so arrogantly reserved, as if the man lecturing on the history of amalgamation and the man who secretly, expertly, and impertinently caressed my bare skin were two different persons entirely I felt his hand all over me, I was insulted, defenceless, achingly and sweetly paralysed by the enormity of this shameless approach Then there came, very faintly, the cloudburst

noise of hand-clapping from the Juno Room, Demoiselle Riedel's singing, which had all the time distantly trilled and tinkled into our retreat, had stopped

"All this has been so highly interesting it almost made me forget my duties as a host," Goethe said, getting up "We must have many more conversations, Conde, you don't know how refreshing your visit has been for me, I hope you will stay with us for a little while?"

"That—depends on certain circumstances In any case will I have to return to Freyberg very soon Herr Oberhuett-namtsassessor Lampadius promised me a demonstration of their pumps which is of the greatest importance to me," he said, accentuating the long German title not without a tinge of sarcasm "You must know, Your Excellency, that I acquired a mine which was flooded fourteen years ago For fourteen years these native animals have been draining and draining and the water still comes up to the middle level But I hope to return with some new methods which will teach them to work with some speed In the meantime, my administrator is doing the best he can by sinking another shaft He is not a bad engineer, a North American, otherwise stupid but honest And now, if Your Excellency would be gracious enough to give me a letter of introduction to Herr von Born——"

"I shall have your letters of introduction ready by tomorrow noon, Conde I think Bergrath Buchholtz in Joachimsthal is the man for you, he is a real mining expert, I am only dabbling a bit in mineralogy——"

"On the contrary, I profited very much from our conversation, Your Excellency," the Conde said, leaving my side, I had been high up in the air, tightrope-walking, and now the rope had broken and I did a deep, dizzy fall and landed hard on a floor of unresilient reality

"The profit was entirely mine, Conde," Goethe said, becoming formal again "Well, Clarinda, shall we go back to my guests?" he said, and looked at me I don't know what he saw in my face, but he stopped at the door, his wide, penetrating eyes travelled from me to the stranger, and then he added with the impish, mephistophelian smile that I recognized from former years "Or is another stanza of *The Hesperides* more than you can bear? Well—why don't you substitute for me and show our friend the rest of the house—my mineral collections, for instance—or, better yet, the garden? Did I tell you that

the crocus bulbs you sent me are putting out shoots already ? Are you interested in gardens at all, Conde ? You must know that my garden is my hobbyhorse and my greatest joy And Clarinda is a beautiful gardener, she will make you a fine guide There's a young moon out tonight and the first violets smell sweetest with the evening dew on them——”

He was gone, and I knew that I should have gone with him I should have run away and saved myself, as if the room were on fire Instead of which I was nailed to my chair, alone with this stranger who waited for me at the half-open door, looking at me with that queer mixture of insolence and arrogant pity

“Well—shall we join the others, Conde ?” I asked weakly

“And listen to another lecture by that unspeakable bore with the fish-face ? Not for the Crown of Spain,” he said, and now that Goethe was gone, not a speck of his ingratiating politeness was left

“That unspeakable bore happens to be my husband,” I said, drawing myself up to my full height and yet feeling small as a gnat

“A million pardons, madame ! How could I have dreamed that you were married ? Since when have white, white little virgins husbands ?”

“Really—I must leave now,” I cried, outraged He held the door open with one hand and, dropping the other to his sword handle, he indicated a bow “As you wish, madame, I'm not holding you By all means, leave—if you must”

I felt whipped, I should have gone then, I should have slapped his face, at least I should have cried But I did nothing of the sort I stayed where I was, he waited another moment, and then he said gently “Well—shall we talk now about us ?”

“There is nothing to say ”

“Not much You know, and I know ”

“I don't know anything I know that you're the most impudent, most impertinent——”

“Come, come,” he said softly, and now he left his side of the room and came over and took my hands and pulled me up from the chair to which I had clung like a drowning person to a thin plank “Don't let's lie Why must there always be so many lies between man and woman, when the truth is so simple and so lovely ? Yo te quiero—y tu me quieres a mi ”

"Don't talk Spanish to me—I don't understand you," I cried desperately as the situation got more and more out of hand

"Oh yes, you do When I came into that room tonight and saw you—I swear, never before had I seen a skin like yours or such hair or such eyes I looked at you, and you looked at me I asked a question and you gave an answer You understood me and you weren't lying then Your eyes didn't lie Forgive me, but my French is insufficient for what I wish to express "

"I don't want to hear it—not another word, do you understand? Not in any language!"

"As you command, Condesa Let's make polite conversation then What is your opinion about His Excellency, our host? I truly enjoyed meeting him He does not know very much about mining, but he seems quite an expert on geology"

"Besides being just about the greatest writer of our time," I said, feeling slighted in the name of all Weimar

"Another one of his little hobbyhorses? He must have a whole stable full of them But then, scribbling seems to be the local fashion," he said, and I did not know whether he wanted to tease me into greater anger or whether he really was so abysmally ignorant

"You can't be serious, Conde You must know something about literature, you must have read some books, you—"

"Why must I? Why should I care for literature? You've heard what my only encounter with Calderón de la Barca did to my life Reading books strikes me as the silliest waste of time imaginable Perhaps the reading of romances supplies old maids with certain emotions they missed in life Some keep lap-dogs for that purpose, and some poets, one seems as little appetizing to me as the other"

"You are a barbarian!"

"Quite possible Also, I am a man"

"But if you feel like that about literature, why, in heaven's name, did you visit Goethe?" I shouted angrily

"For the simplest and most sensible of reasons after all, His Excellency is the director of the Department of Mining of the duchy, and I was recommended to him as to a personage of great influence through whom I could gain access to certain information I need for my studies Well—shall we go into the garden now and smell the evening dew on the first violets?" he added sardonically

He opened the door, bowed slightly, and let me pass. It did not help much to have him out of my sight, for I felt his presence in every pore of my skin, every inch of me seemed to throb with a pulse of its own, and all of a sudden electricity was no mystery to me any longer "Tell me," he said behind me, "tell me why you looked at me the way you did when you saw me first, but no lying now"

"Because I was curious, that was all," I said. He took me by the shoulders, turned me towards him, and searched in my face "Curious? About me? What is it you want to know?"

"Nothing. Silly things. Your hair, for instance—it looks queer."

"Oh, that," he said, touching his hairline with two fingers "A little whim of mine, a little vanity. I use silver dust to powder it with. Do you object?"

"It sounds as improbable as it looks. And powdered hair is old-fashioned."

"You wouldn't prefer me to go around unkempt and ill-groomed like a Jacobin? And it isn't at all improbable! We have so much silver, we don't know what to do with it. Listen, Comtesse, on the top of La Valenciana—that's the richest mine near Guanaxuato—the Conde Obregón de Valenciana built a church, and the powder for the bricks was mixed with silver and wine. Why shouldn't I use a few ounces of silver dust for my hair?"

I caught myself openmouthed, gaping once more. I closed my mouth, pulled my countenance together, and went through the door. As we approached the front part of the house I could hear Albert's clogged-up voice scanning hexameter after hexameter in a sleep-inducing rise and fall. And suddenly I knew that I couldn't bear listening to another iambus in all my life. I took the only road of retreat from the flood of metrics about to engulf me, on tiptoe I made my way to the garden room, hesitated, and then stepped out onto the wooden stairs which led down into the garden. The Conde followed me in complete silence.

Goethe had not promised too much, the night was lovely, the moon barcaroled softly through a host of small clouds, a silver moon through silver clouds, dripping a fine edge of silver upon every moist leaf and twig. The whole world was made of silver, because I had met a stranger who powdered his hair

with it It was cool and damp after the day's rain and I shivered "Domingo?" I heard him say softly

At that time I was not yet acquainted with Domingo's ability of being—like God—invisible yet omnipresent It startled me when suddenly the silent figure of the Indio stood at the foot of the stairs and handed his master the black cloak It lifted the scenery completely out of reality and transformed these familiar flower beds and boxwood hedges and tidy garden walks into the backdrop of a fantastic stage where anything might happen "You are cold, Chiquita," the stranger said, spreading that outlandish cape over my shoulders, it was soft and warm and gave me a feeling of being safe and protected as nothing had ever given me since my father's early death Up to that moment I had been shocked and frightened, why as simple a thing as being wrapped in a stranger's black cape should in one single moment change everything—to that I have no answer, for it belongs to the unreasonable, inexplicable nothings of which the fabric of love is woven "Thank you, that's a lovely cloak," I said, and now I could smile up to the man with a new kind of confidence He was unbuckling his sword and handing it to the Indio, who vanished with it as if by magic There was something ritual in this simple act, a preparation for I did not know what The house stood silent with softly lighted, curtained windows The one high up under the roof, I knew, belonged to Goethe's little illegitimate son, who was acknowledged by society even if his mother, the Demoiselle Vulpius, was not Having wanted a child so very badly and not having borne one made me ache a little whenever I contemplated another woman's son I shook the fleeting pain off and formally introduced the garden to the Conde de las Fuentes "This is the garden," I said, "and there you see Goethe's famous copper beech tree Down this way his asparagus bed, and the wall yonder is part of the old town walls, it's called the Ackerwand and there is a small gate leading into the park which belongs to our Duke but is open to the public day and night——"

I broke off as I heard the Conde's soft laugh "You see?" he said

"I see what?"

"You are a barbarian yourself! At this moment you should be listening to your husband's lecture—instead of which you are taking a moonlight promenade with a man you don't

know, indeed, you're practically inviting this impudent subject to take you out into the woods. Be frank—you don't care a blade of grass for literature yourself! You are curious—and not of the things you may read in books. But yes, you are a barbarian, Countess, you should come to Mexico with me. It is a barbaric country!"

"If you don't like Mexico, why do you live there?"

"Why? Why does anyone live in Mexico? To get rich as quickly as possible."

"Aren't you rich now?"

"Not rich enough. I have to be very rich."

"And what will you do when you are very rich? Return to your Castillo in Spain?"

"Are you being curious again?"

"Yes. I want to know what keeps you out of Spain when you are homesick for it."

"Who told you that I am homesick?" he asked with a little rasp in his voice.

"I could see it in your face when you spoke about your country."

"I didn't ask you what made you sad when you looked at that little window up there a moment ago," he said softly.

That was the second tiny stone in the precious mosaic of our first meeting. You are cold, Chiquita. What made you sad when you looked at that little window? Nobody had ever cared enough for me to notice such small things, I myself had hardly noticed them. I lowered my eyes and waited, I still didn't know for what.

"Pues—I shall tell you what keeps me out of Spain," he said, walking me away from the stairs and towards the deep, dense shadows of the Ackerwand. "I shall tell it to you in one word. I am persona non grata at the Escorial. I have enemies, persons of great influence with His Majesty. You've heard of Manuel Godoy, of course?"

Of course I hadn't. Spain was as far away from Helgenhausen as the moon and had never been of the slightest concern to me.

"Well, Godoy—or as he calls himself now, the Duke of Alcudia—stands very high in the favour of Her Majesty the Queen, and he also has great influence with our King Carlos IV. But to me this former sergeant of the Guards is nothing but an upstart and one of the worst ministers Spain has ever had and,

by God, she has had many bad ministers. There were good reasons for me to keep myself out of Spain as long as Godoy had all the power, but when the French persuaded His Majesty to discharge Godoy, I thought that the time had come for my return, and I undertook this voyage under great difficulties and with not a few sacrifices, in the hope of being admitted into my country at last. But it seems that Godoy's influence, although not officially acknowledged, is as strong as ever, and there is even some talk of his being reinstated in office. I am afraid another upstart will see to that this little French general, this self-made Consul, this Bonaparte. No, as long as there is a Godoy close to the throne I can't return. But these are boring matters, Chiquita, I know of much nicer things to tell you——”

“No, no,” I said in a panic. “This interests me very much. Why do you hate this Godoy so? And why is he your enemy?”

“I hate him because he serves my Queen and my King badly. And he hates me because I killed a man who happened to be his cousin.”

I had never seen anyone who had killed anybody, and the completely casual air with which he mentioned it opened a deep chasm between me and my stranger.

“You killed a man? But that's not possible. I can't understand it——” I whispered, and was surprised at finding my mouth suddenly dry and my voice cracked.

He shrugged it off as if the killing of men were a commonplace occupation among Spanish grandes, maybe it was. “My bad luck,” he said. “But if I hadn't shot him, he would have run his sword through my heart. And how was I to know that he was Godoy's cousin?”

“A duel, then?” I asked hopefully, although a duel in which one man wielded a sword and the other aimed a pistol seemed something extraordinary. But by now I had the impression that anything was possible in Spain. “Or did it happen in the war?”

“In a way—yes. Except that this war was fought over the favours of a little actress and the battlefield was her bedroom,” he said, and laughed softly to himself. I drew away from him, but he clasped his arm around my shoulder and held me to his side. We had walked up and down the path and stood now in the clear moonlight and he came down to me from his tallness.

and searched in my face "Now I have shocked you," he said gently "Pobrecita, and what a fool I am! Bringing my story in with the rear end first, instead of beginning with the beginning. For, I assure you, I really killed my man out of sheer innocence."

We had arrived under the beech tree whose bare branches and small compact buds stood sharply silhouetted against the moon-pale sky and threw a fine pattern of shadows over the Conde's face. He smiled down at me almost consolingly as he went on "You see, I was hardly seventeen when I escaped San Capistrán, and I knew very little about the world outside a monastery. I had no money whatsoever, and my new tonsure betrayed me whenever a breeze blew off my hat. The theatrical company which was the reason for all this upheaval had left Toledo and I spent some desperate weeks before I finally found them in a suburb of Madrid, where they were performing in a building that was more of a stable than a comedy house. Today I know that Carlita was quite a shopworn piece who made up in experience what she lacked in youth and charm. But then I was a young fool and she was the first woman I slept with, and when she accepted me as her lover, I considered every minute lost which we didn't spend in bed. She must have cared for me, for she even supplied me with a few pesetas, and some of the actors, good-natured if uneducated fellows, taught me to play cards and carambole and throw the dice with a juggler's dexterity, and so I developed a fairly lucky hand at gambling. Because I was so very innocent it didn't occur to me that Carlita might have other lovers, wealthier men who could give her more than kisses and were less green and unsuspecting than I was. And so one fine night this cousin of Godoy's broke into our bedchamber with three hired ruffians and threatened me with his sword. Carlita pushed a pistol into my hand and I shot and killed him. I assure you, there was very little pleasure in killing that fool, and whatever little there was of it, I paid dearly for it. After three days I was arrested, thrown into jail, brought before a court, and sentenced to death. My father then succeeded in bribing the jailer, and I escaped another time and was smuggled aboard a galleon bound for America. I don't want to bore you with my further adventures, Lindita. Enough that I arrived in New Spain by devious ways and after many dangerous detours. That was almost ten years ago. Ten years is a long

time to be in exile But some day soon I swear I shall be rich enough to bribe my way back into Spain and I shall be received at the Escorial and into the grace of my King And that is all—or do you want to hear more about me ?”

His wild, untrammelled world had broken into mine, which was small and orderly and self-contained I discovered that my foremost reaction was a furious and bitter jealousy of a cheap Spanish actress, a shopworn piece, who had been in bed with a man I had not known two hours ago My mouth had gone dry once more and my throat was tight The moonlight shone very white on the walk and the shadow of the wall cut a sharp geometrical pattern into the swimming whiteness

“Yes I want to know everything about you,” I said There came his short, arrogant, soft little laugh again and he asked “Really ? Everything ?” He tilted my face up to him and the light of the moon was so strong that I had to close my eyes and still felt its whiteness on my eyelids “Let me look at you, Queridita,” he said, “you are beautiful Yes, you are very, very beautiful”

Nobody had ever said such a thing to me I was beautiful Standing there with the moonlight on my face, I could feel myself being beautiful and growing more and more beautiful with every second Then his shadow and his warmth came between me and the moon, and when I opened my eyes I found him bent over me, and his face was filled with such an unexpected, almost painful seriousness, that it frightened me He seemed to sense even this fleeting fear, for he said with a taut smile, as if trying to make light of the moment “What did his Excellency call you ? Clarinda ? Oh, como eres linda, mi Condesa Clarinda, pequeña cara linda——”

I, too, tried to smile away the unbearably mounting tension, the storm, the cataract, the avalanche, the landslide—whatever it was that I felt irrevocably breaking down over me “So you are making poems, too, after all,” I whispered, with my voice all gone

“No,” he said, “I am living them ”

And then he had pulled me expertly into the black shadow triangle of the wall and had taken my face between his hands and his eyes were on me with the strict and severe demand of his maleness, earnest like an animal’s eyes, and his mouth closed over mine and I wanted to cry about all the experiences which had taught him to kiss like this, and then there was a

great relieved sweetness as I discovered that he, too, was trembling and afraid of this our first embrace

I do not know how long we stood thus, he with his legs braced apart, all man, all hard muscle, hard urge, holding my body against his, sucking me into him, but it was like a whole long summertime during which I felt myself ripen like a fruit, growing all soft and sweet and heavy inside, ready to be plucked When I opened my eyes again, the moonlight was gone, a thin film of clouds had begun to cover the sky, and a first few raindrops rustled in the trees and fell upon my hair and my lips where they mingled with a drop of blood

"Now you know everything about me," he said as he released me and handed me back to the drenching night

"Yes Now I know everything," I said

I had never been so happy nor so unhappy in all my twenty-two years

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday We met three times, for a few minutes only, to exchange a few words fraught with hidden meaning Once on a morning ride in the Webbicht, once at a tea in the house of the Montgolfière, and once on the street, in full view of all Weimar Each time we met it was only to say farewell Adiós por siempre Adieu pour jamais Auf Nimmerwiedersehen. Good-bye for ever I did not complain, I had known from the first that he would have to go away, return to Freyberg, to Herr Oberhuettenamtsassessor Lam-padius and his demonstration of pumps, to his silver mine, to getting rich, to sinking deeper shafts than anyone else would dare, to his barbarous Mexico, to his own turbulent, alien, masculine life

On Tuesday evening Babette remarked that the Spanish grandee had left the town for good One week later, on Shrove Tuesday, the great Redoute took place to which Albert went as a spindly-legged Virgil, Mademoiselle de Guermontagne as a handsome and highly symbolic Jeanne d'Arc, and I myself as a benumbed, stunned, heart-broken, and gaily dressed-up milk-maid

And there, in the full glare of hundreds of mirrored candles, was the Conde de las Fuentes

There he was in his full, thoroughbred arrogance, he had not even taken the trouble of disguising himself or throwing a domino robe over his clothes He wore his black cape and his

little tasselled Spanish hat and, as a mere geste, a small half mask which didn't pretend to deceive anyone I stood paralysed and for a moment I thought him to be only a vision, a mirage conjured up by my thirsty heart and hungry eyes I had seen nothing but him in all the hours of these last few days and nights He was painted inside my brain and my eyelids and my aching chest But now he was real enough He stood there, loose-jointed, listening with slightly derisive politeness to the Montgolfière, who, quite mistakenly dressed as a blustering Bajadere, was hanging on his arm

"Now I must leave you to the gods, beautiful hour," he said as soon as he discovered me "A mortal of my low standing may not take up too much of your time All I can hope for is a dance with a simple little milkmaid" And with that and a bow and a flash of his smile he brushed Cousin Cornelia off as if she were no more than a fat maggot on his sleeve

"*Bon soir,*" he said softly as he put his arm around me and waltzed me off "*Bon soir, m'amie*"

"You have come back? Why did you? Why have you come back?" I asked with very little control over my voice

"Because you wished for me to be here tonight and dance with you Don't lie now, Caralinda Don't say you did not Aren't you glad that we're together once more?"

"No, I'm not," I said, and I did not lie "I have had all the farewells I can bear It was finished and over between us Why did you have to come back and hurt me some more?"

"Finished and over? Why, it hasn't even commenced yet," he said laughingly "But tonight—" he said, and then he closed his mouth tightly and we danced on in silence "Tonight you must come away with me," he said very seriously a little later

"Away? Where to? How could I?"

"What is the matter with you, Chiquita, that you make the simplest matter seem difficult? I must be alone with you, once I can't go away without having been with you, really with you, even if it were only this one time Look here I tried and I can't Dios mio, how I missed you! What have you done to me? I am not the man I was before I knew you Listen to me," he said eagerly "Listen before I came to this town I had a little affair with a girl at the hotel in Freyberg, a little thing, soft and fluffy and warm and amorous as a kitten On my return she waited with open arms for me and I spent a few hours with

her because I was trying very earnestly to get you out of my blood and my skin and my bones Mind you—not out of my heart and memory, but out of this confounded, rebellious body of mine And now let me tell you what happened to me In little Mariechen's arms I suffered the boredom of all bore-doms, I made myself the failure of all failures What have you done to spoil for me one of the few good things a man may get out of life ? What is there in your small, white, unyielding innocence to make me run around like a poisoned rat ? Finished and over ? You don't know what you're talking about ! Come away with me now—this minute I can't wait much longer, I want to kiss you I want you—never in my life did I want any woman as I want you, and I've known beautiful ones and artful ones, but never did any one of them excite me as you do ”

I was stunned by the brutality of his courtship , it was like a blow in my face, a terrible blow to my pride It also was the most wonderful, most stirring and flattering compliment I could dream of Already I had travelled the downward path far enough to consider a little hotel maid my rival and to be proud that this stranger preferred me to her

“I can see that you're not discriminating You must have made many easy conquests in your life,” I remarked bitterly, just to torture myself a trifle He contemplated this with some thoroughness

“Not many,” he answered at last “No, not so very many”

“How many, then ? A hundred ? Two hundred ? A thousand ?”

At that he threw his head back and began to laugh “You damsels !” he called out “You charming, innocent young ladies, what exaggerated ideas you must have about the virility and physical endurance of man ! Upon my word, I don't know how many, I don't keep a book like Don Juan Tenorio's Leporello, and there is nothing memorable about the usual affair Offhand I may remember six, maybe seven, who gave me some pleasure The rest don't count, even if there really were a hundred of them You see, Caralinda there are the many , and then there is the one ” He drew me a bit closer and we danced on “It is very rare,” he said then, and his voice was softer than before, “it is of the utmost rarity, but it does happen that a man meets the one woman It happened to me when I saw thee for the first time I had never believed in

it, yet suddenly I knew that it existed The *coup de foudre* That one, I thought That's the one and no other As if—oh, curse my French—as if I had dreamed thee so strongly, with such an urge and desire, as to make thee come to life You must know, I have very strong dreams Never did I make love in reality with such a complete rapture as I do in my dreams But with thee, I will Come away with me now, my little dream, come away ”

“There is nothing the matter with your French,” I said “You express yourself with extreme clarity Come away with you ? But you forget that I am not a little Mariechen I'm not a girl to spend one night with and leave in the morning, after dropping a lous d'or on her bed Come away with you, indeed ! Do you want me to make a scandal of myself ?”

He tore off the mask which had given his face—as all masks do—a playfully malevolent expression, and now I saw that he had turned very pale “Yes Yes, I want a scandal,” he said, holding on to himself “I also want to beat you until you comprehend what I am trying to tell you I love you I love you I do not believe in love and, damn you, I love you Come away Domingo is waiting with the carriage We'll drive to some village, we'll make station at some country inn where we can be alone for an hour or two—and then, if you insist, I shall take you back to the ball and no one will even notice that you have been away It is not much I'm asking of you, is it ? I won't do anything you won't have me do, of this I give you my word of honour But we must be alone for once, there is a world we have to tell each other Or just be silent together Yes, it is very important for us to be silent together, believe me, good and close and silent It will still some of the restlessness in us—give us a bit of peace Come away, dear heart, no one is going to miss you here ”

“Maybe such mad things can be done in Mexico Not in Weimar Not in this country,” I said feebly, and as I said it I knew that I had already given in

“Why not here ? Are the people here made of wood instead of blood and flesh ? Why, even in Weimar it must happen once in a while that a woman falls in love with a man who is not her husband Or does such an outrage never occur in your overstuffed society ?”

“We are not overstuffed, and if you want to know the truth, there is hardly a married lady in Weimar who wouldn't have a

lover or several of them—even if we aren't Paris or Madrid," I replied angrily, almost proud of our local brand of promiscuity

"Well, then—what do I have to do before I'm permitted to hold your hand and talk to you without five hundred idiots staring at us? Go over and insult your husband? Force him into a duel and kill him?" he said in a white blaze of anger—and with that our dance was over

"You don't understand," I said miserably, I was unable to put into words what I felt I love you but you only want to seduce me With me it's love and with you it's all desire and excitement With you it's one hour and with me it's for ever "I want you to go away I never want to see you again," I said, rude with despair

He turned still a shade whiter as he bent over my hand, suddenly all formality and grand Spanish manners "A sus órdenes," he said "As you command And thanks for the dance and thanks for letting me know you and thanks again and again"

"Adieu then," I said, "and bon voyage. And—oh yes—good luck for the deep shaft you're going to sink in your mine"

So intense had been our dialogue that I had forgotten altogether what went on around us The crowd, hazy in the dust stirred up by dancing feet, fantastic and grotesque in their costumes, held little reality for me The air was heavy, and the voices, the laughter, the music blended into a constant roar

"I'm afraid I'm getting a trifle dizzy," I mumbled shakily "So sorry," Felipe said coldly and, stiffly offering me his arm, he led me away Out through a small door, down a few steps into the darkness, and on into the cool, dank air of a dimly lit passage where props for the impending mummers' parade were lined up in their dusty, gilded cardboard pomp Pan's flute and his furry leggings, garlands of grapes and wine leaves for Bacchus and his satyrs, Diana's chaste helmet, bow, and arrow. Felipe leaned me against the wall and searched my face urgently and I shook my head He let go of me and stepped back

"Adieu then, if you want this to be the end Adios, my only one Que Dios te bendiga," he said With two of his long, slim fingers he made the sign of the cross over me, beginning at my forehead, down to my heart, and lightly touching both my shoulders It was a stranger's strange, alien fare-thee-well

"There is something silly I have to ask you," I said, trying to break out of the spell "When you are gone—by what name shall I remember you? I can't very well think of you as the Conde de las Fuentes"

"You must not think of me You must try to forget me quickly And, listen, Caralinda some day, sooner or later, you, too, will take a lover That he may be a good man, Caralinda, that he may be worthy of you——"

While I still waited for his next word he turned away and was gone He walked away so swiftly and was so lithe of step that not a sound was to be heard as the darkness of the stairway blotted him out I do not know how long I remained standing there, very exhausted and terribly alone, among the dusty props From the ballroom came the sound of three fanfares announcing the arrival of the Duke and his retinue, and I grew frantic Surely I was in no condition at that moment to face the Court and all of gossiping, frolicking Weimar Blindly I opened one of the small doors down the passage which seemed to promise an exit towards escape And thus it happened that I walked straight into the situation which subsequently led to the ironical misunderstanding that caused Poor Albert to put me in my grave just when I was discovering what it meant to be alive

The chamber on whose threshold I stood arrested seemed to have been designated as a dressing room for the nymphs and dryads of the parade, there were mirrors, costumes, cheesecloth and organdie, more gilded cardboard, all the Olympic paraphernalia of the mummery Also, there was a couch

On the couch the Guermontagne was poured out in a melting pose, and before her Poor Albert was kneeling with complete disregard for the dust collecting on his bare legs and knees His head was resting in the Guermontagne's lap and she was just bending over him to bestow a kiss on his thin, reddish hair with the paper laurel wreath Straightening up, she detected me standing in the door, she gave a small gasp, at which my husband abandoned his attitude of the Genius Kissed By His Muse and turned towards me with a pale, unbelieving, and guilty stare The whole scene was quite farcical and somewhat pathetic, and if I had been in a different mood I should have laughed about it As it was, I muttered an embarrassed apology and withdrew in haste All astir, Poor Albert caught up with me in the corridor outside "I assure

you, Clarinda, not what you are thinking, upon my word of honour I assure you, Annabelle is innocent——” he stammered and stuttered “Never mind, dear,” I replied “I only wanted to tell you that I am leaving the ball Kindly excuse me with Serenissimus But I have a terrible headache Good night”

I shook him off and ran away down the long dim passage The door to the stairway stood ajar, I stumbled up a few steps, it was dark there, and warm, a pounding, breathing, heart-beating, engulfing darkness and warmth, and I found myself in Felipe’s arms

“Well——” I said breathlessly

“Well?” he said, and waited

“Are you still here?” I asked stupidly

“Yes I’m still here You will never be rid of me Never,” he answered

Three days after that evening I was sitting at a small rickety table under the dormer window of the only guest room at the Red Boar in Otternfurt, trying to write a letter of farewell to Poor Albert. Otternfurt was the village whither I had once escaped for the unforgettable harvest dance, and the Red Boar was the only place that had come to my mind for meeting Felipe in secret. He had just left me to go downstairs and inquire if and when a post chaise for Erfurt was to pass through and to make sure that we would find seats in it. Coming to this rendezvous, he had left all his splendour behind, he hadn’t arrived in his private travel coach, nor had he brought any baggage with him—all of which seemed well planned and very discreet. He had just left, but his aggressive, fierce having-been-there still filled the small room from one slanting wall to the other. The air still seemed to tremble with the hot disorder of the night that lay behind us. I looked at the bed which looked back at me with the sly air of a conspirator. Its hangings were shabby and faded, the mattress lumpy, and the squeaking of the old meuble might have disturbed less ardent lovers than Felipe and me. On the window sill stood a chipped earthenware washbasin, not much larger than a saucer, and on the bare, creaking floor of scrubbed pine a small water jug, cracked and held together by a network of wire. On the table before me I had a crooked brass candle holder with a burned-down tallow candle. There were two chairs, on one of them my brush and comb formed a sloppy still life with my shawl and my bonnet, or rather Babette’s shawl and

bonnet—for I had come to this rendezvous disguised in my chambermaid's tight bodice and blue skirt On the other chair stood the small inlaid box which contained the silver dust with which it pleased Felipe to powder his hair Leaning against the bed somewhat theatrically was his dress sword with the black cloak draped over it Near the door our two travel bags squatted on the floor together, with an air of resolution and finality about them Outside there hung a misty morning, pierced by the boastful cackling of a hen who sounded as if she had never laid an egg before and wanted the whole world to know about the miracle, and from farther away came the turbulent rush and roar of the rain-flooded river, deep organ voice of spring which had been with us all through the night

Altogether it was a poorly decorated stage on which had been performed the world-old drama of a first love-night, complete with prologue and epilogue, the comic scenes and the serious ones, exposition, suspense, intermission, climax and catharsis, clowning and heroics, exciting contrasts, enchanted harmonies, and not a few surprising developments Yet, for all its dismal shabbiness, this room had at times seemed filled with a tumultuous train of gods and fauns and nymphs, their bodies entwined as I had seen them in some of the engravings Goethe had brought from Italy, the low ceiling had opened up and widened into the boundless fields and groves of ancient mysteries, and the slanting walls had turned into tropical forests, the silver-blue primeval forests of which Felipe had whispered to me, where birds with great noiseless red wings hung in the air and jewelled butterflies and colibris alighted on my unbelieving lips

It had been a night of great and valiant exploit and amazing discoveries for me, and the woman who had lain down in the questionable bed—shy, awkward, and very unsure of her own talents as a lover—was not the same who had got up late in the morning, feeling victorious and re-created in every languorous, tired limb

There is, I believe, among the hundred caresses of a lover—the thousand if he is imaginative—one that is all his own and sweet beyond all others Felipe would spread the palm of his hand over the back of mine and lead it to his forehead, where his hair grew into those two keen arcs, he would press my fingers against his closed eyes and let them rest there for a minute, where I could feel the fine pulsing in his lids, and thence

to his mouth to fill my palm with a harvest of small hard kisses, and down along the stretched sinews of his throat, where it met his scapulary, and then along the fine bones and muscles of his shoulder, down to his heart, to let my hand listen to its hard strong beat and to give answer with my own pulse

Whenever a man and a woman go to bed together for the first time they enter on a great, perilous venture. Being without any experience, I had not known what a rare thing is the perfect communion of two bodies, but Felipe knew, and he was not going to let anyone take it away from him ever again. As for me—there was no choice. When I had come to this shabby room in a poor country inn I had made myself believe that it was only for an amorous rendezvous, for a clandestine adventure such as most married women I knew permitted themselves once in a while. But now it was morning and I knew that out of the bottomless pit of such a night there was no return to the flat routine of my marriage and duty. I had to go with Felipe wherever he would take me and be with him thereafter, for better and for worse.

I tore a page from Felipe's writing block and set his crayon to work.

"Dear Albert," I wrote, "this is a letter of farewell, for by the time you will receive it I shall be gone from you for ever. Forgive me, if you can, the sorrow my leaving may cause you and try to understand that there is no other way open to me. Our marriage was a mistake from the beginning, a mistake I am about to redeem. I always was aware how little I meant in your life and how easily I shall be replaced. You must believe me, Albert, if I say that I wish you may find in the love of Annabelle de Guermontagne all the happiness I was unable to give you. Please try to remember me without any rancour and think kindly of me, as I am thinking of you in this hour of my departure. And if you want to keep a friendly memory of our marriage, please, Albert, respect the last request I shall ever make of you and do not press the search for me. You will be happier if you do not probe into the secret of my disappearance, and it will give me the peace for which I am paying with everything I was and I possessed."

So far I had written with great attention, choosing my words carefully and taking pains to make the situation clear to Albert without hurting his feelings more than necessary, yet written with the relief a child may experience when it is released from

school and allowed to run along and play at last But now, all of a sudden, as I was to put down the word Helgenhausen, my throat tightened and my eyes brimmed over with tears, for now it came to the real farewell My two newborn calves, the warm smells of the stable, the peaceful sounds of cows munching their hay, and the soft hissing of their milk into the pails at milking time The long-lashed eyes of my favourite heifer following me down the aisle between the stalls, my dog Diana and her two puppies, one fawn-coloured with black ears and muzzle, the other a black-and-white harlequin The foal that would be born to my dappled-grey mare after I was gone, the chestnut filly I had not quite broken in My asparagus beds, my fine strawberries to be tended, my patch of anemones which I would never see in bloom again My home which I was to give up for an unknown faraway Good-bye to you, and a thousand times good-bye

I gulped down my weakness and snuffed up the unbidden tears I went over to the bed and threw myself on it, digging my face into the lumpy, tumbled pillows which held some of the wild, bittersweet scent of Felipe's hair, as if to draw from it some new will power for my decision

"What is it you perfume your hair with, Felipe ?"

"Oh, that ? An essence brewed from some Mexican herb, it keeps the hair rich and glossy," he had told me as we were resting in a glen of silence between embrace and embrace It had made me smile

"Are you vain, Felipe ?"

"Naturally, I'm vain, very vain However, not more so than the male of the species is meant by nature to be "

"Is he ?"

"But certainly An ugly macho—male—is a decadent thing God wanted man to be strong and beautiful and a perpetual invitation to the little female "

"A peacock showing off his tail feathers ?"

"Yes Or a stag—did you ever watch how proudly a stag will parade his crown before the females of his herd ? Or a bearded mountain lion, the blue-arsed headman of a monkey tribe, a bird of paradise—"

"I never saw lions or monkeys or birds of paradise "

"You will, Chiquita, with me you will I will show you sights you never dreamed of in your dull little town In Mexico—"

I never tired of making him talk about Mexico, to me, there was more poetry in Felipe's tales of Mexico than in all the poems of all the great poets of all of classical Weimar

I tore myself away from the memories of the night, I left the bittersweet fragrance of those lumpy pillows, which were at the moment the only home I had, and returned reinforced and dutifully to my farewell letter

" say good-bye to you and to Helgenhausen and may God bless you and may He forgive me for what I am about to do "

It seemed as good an ending as I would ever find, but now I did not know how to sign that letter Your obedient wife ? That seemed absurd in view of the situation Simply Clarinda ? It did not appear quite solemn enough I put my crayon to work once more and with a flourish I set down my full signature Clarinda Countess Driesen, née Countess von und zu der Werra Last night I had taken off my wedding ring and now I put it into my letter, which I carefully folded, sealing it with some hot tallow from the candle I surveyed the finished document and was satisfied with its looks and content

When Felipe entered the room the floor hardly creaked under his light steps of a dancer and a fencer and a thoroughbred In the first onrush of love such small things are important, noticed with delight, and counted up as so many more reasons for losing one's head

"That confounded mail coach doesn't come through here before the late afternoon," he reported moodily "What would you like to do until then ? Shall we ride in our phaeton to the Prado and greet the *beau monde* of Madrid ? Or sip some coffee and cognac at the Café Tortoni and watch the Parisian Incroyables and Merveilleuses promenade by in their scandalous raiments ? We might also arrange for a race of the bedbugs and lay high wagers as the Indios do in Mexico ? Holy Mother of God, what a dismal place to spend our first day together ! And what are you doing there ? "

"Getting everything in order before we leave A letter to my husband, also, I owe Babette an explanation, she expects me back before my husband's return from Jena——"

"And what's all this rubbish ?" he asked, absent-mindedly picking up one by one my knitted silk purse, containing five gold pieces and some small coins which I had precariously saved up from my butter-and-egg money, Babette's blue

reticule designed to go with her blue skirt, and a flat, small leather case tied together with a green ribbon

"Give it to me These are Babette's things which I found in her pocket The silly girl seems to have thought that I might need some sort of an identification to go with my disguise, or perhaps she simply forgot them when she laced me into her three petticoats and her short chambermaid's dress "

"Nothing so silly about that," he said absent-mindedly as he let his glance wander to the hem of my blue linen skirt and my white stockings "You and your disguise ! You would look a princess even in rags," he remarked, unfolding the papers and examining them with nonchalant curiosity There were Babette's birth certificate and a testimonial by the old school-teacher of our village, Klein Werra, acknowledging that she had gone through four school classes with good grades, and a sauf-conduit card, the like we had to obtain for all our servants to ensure that they might enter and leave the towns and hamlets of the duchy without hindrance All the fussy odds and ends the high authorities of Saxony-Weimar demanded from the law-abiding subjects, and everything correctly sealed, signed, and written out in the flourishing cursive hand of various petty officials Once or twice, while reading, Felipe laughed softly and condescendingly, as was his habit "Hear, hear !" he said "Babette Schmielz What a godforsaken name ! Mother Babette Schmielz, father unknown Yes, it's a wise child that knows its own father ! And so poor Mother Babette Schmielz was left to pay the bill, was Babette ? Left, with Daughter Schmielz and with her broken heart and her lost honour," he said with a bitterness I could not quite understand yet

"On the contrary ! As I was informed, there was one father too many, Large Babette could never make up her mind whether it could have been that handsome Austrian soldier or that fresh Bohemian journeyman with the snub nose," I said, to make him laugh again Felipe wrapped the papers up with great care "You're a journeyman yourself," he said, and I could see that his mind was still on something else "Yesterday you were an apprentice, today you're a fine little journeyman, if it depends on me, you'll soon be a past master in the great old art of making love—and what are you doing now ?" he asked as I stuffed letters, purse, and papers into Babette's blue reticule

"I'm sending Babette my letter for my husband, and her papers and the little money I had on me If you could tell Domingo to see that it all goes to Weimar with the next mail——"

"Eres loco ?" he said "Are you crazy ? We certainly shall need these papers sooner or later How far do you think we would get without them ? Babette Schmielz isn't——Well, it isn't precisely the name I would have chosen for you, but it will have to do until we get to France or Italy, where false papers can be obtained against a consideration Why, in the name of Satan, couldn't you take your own documents along ?"

There were many reasons I didn't know that I was going to run away with you, I might have told him My own documents are safely locked away in my husband's desk and I could not steal them Also, never having travelled beyond the radius of Weimar where everybody knew me, it had never even occurred to me that such documents were needed But all I said was "If I were to travel with my own papers, as Countess Driesen, I should be trapped by the gendarmes and returned to Helgenhausen before nightfall "

"That's true," he said "Still, I am a snob and I would have preferred to travel in the company of a countess instead of with one Demoiselle Schmielz, father unknown Now give me that letter for your husband, I'll dispatch Domingo with it and order some of the abominable food they serve in this pigsty "

He sounded morose and somehow distraught, strangely sober after the abandoned fevers of last night At the door he stopped and I smiled at him, for I thought he would come back and kiss me But he kept himself there, rigid at the other end of the room, as he said gravely "I love you, Clarinda Do you hear me ? I love you Whatever may happen to us, you must never forget that I love you If you should ever regret that you went away with me, you must tell yourself Felipe loves me All you saints in heaven—and how I do love you, Caralinda !"

"I shall never regret that I am going with you," I said just as gravely "By why, Felipe, why is it ? Why did it happen to you and me ? Why do you love me ? Why do I love you ?"

"Why ? Love that can give a reason isn't love any more *A bientôt, Demoiselle Schmielz,*" he answered He dropped

Babette's reticule with her papers into his gaping, tired travel bag and carried my farewell letter for Albert away with him
And that was how my headless journey began

In our garden room in Klein Werra was a glass door which had been the delight of my childhood, it was puzzled together in a pattern of small stained-glass pieces, little squares and triangles and circles and stars, emerald green, sapphire blue, garnet red, topaz yellow It was the one patch of colour in the dim greyness of my early years, and I would spend hours and hours gazing through it and making the garden outside change to any fairy-tale hue and shade I pleased travelling with my lover through Europe meant seeing the world through just such a magic, many-coloured window and in such a crazy, broken-up pattern

I travelled under a name that was not my own, with a man who was not my husband, but not the tiniest shadow of remorse dimmed my bliss I had no power over the direction into which my destiny had blown me, and yet I had never felt as safe and protected and justified as I did then There was no rational reason for that feeling, either, for I soon discovered that our journey was an amazing zig-zag of ups and downs, of going back and forth, of detouring and doubling on our tracks, of hasty departures and protracted sojourns, sometimes we stayed in the best hostellries and were waited upon by princely headwaiters, and then again we took abode in some filthy little inn where drunk noisemakers filled the taproom, and the sounds of a dubious back street giggled and whispered under our window Sometimes we would ride in our own smart travel carriage, with a fine team of horses waiting for us at every station, where Domingo with his overbearing dignity would herald our arrival and draw crowds of onlookers around the luxurious vehicle, and sometimes again we would travel by common stagecoach, squeezed in with Krethi and Plethi, the rain leaking through the roof, and the pitiless bouncing and rattling of the voyage shaking every bone and tooth out of place And then there were the days and weeks when, for some reason which Felipe did not divulge to me, we could not go on at all but had to wait in some town for something to happen that was to send us off on our way again We had hardly an itinerary and no definite well-chartered course, for Europe was in its usual imbroglio and disorder, even more so

than usual, what with Napoleon and his soldiers being here and there and everywhere, as the self-appointed French First Consul had begun to shuffle principalities and duchies and kingdoms like so many playing cards he was dealing out at his pleasure There were armies on the march and armies in training and on manœuvre, and other armies sitting tight, and yet other armies defending or occupying this corner of the continent and that The air was buzzing with rumours, and among travellers and at the table d'hôte the talk revolved around the ever same and yet daily changing news which highways were open and which weren't, whither one might journey without danger to life and limb, from which parts better to stay away, and, above all, by what means, bribes, or connections one might obtain *sauf-conduits*, permits, and passports from the authorities of today—who were frequently not the authorities of yesterday or of next week

The farther away we got from Weimar, the more insignificant appeared literature with all its appendages, and the more important became the state the world was in During these first weeks of our journey I learned more history than I had in all my lessons with old Rector Bemelmann at home When we came to Mainz we found that General Moreau's armies held the entire left bank of the Rhine, and still more French troops stood in Switzerland, where Napoleon, after having suppressed the royalist uprising of the Vendée, was girding himself for crossing the St Gotthard However, when we doubled on our tracks and turned our noses towards the Austrian frontier, we were informed that the Austrians were just beginning their spring operations in Italy and getting ready to fight General Masséna, who was besieging Genoa, a fact which made our prospects of sailing from there highly questionable In other words, the French were everywhere, and only God knew what they might do next Only God knew what side the Russians might ultimately take or whether the Prussians would ever enter a second coalition against the French again, after the unfortunate outcome of the first one For the Allies of yesterday were the enemies of tomorrow, as it will always happen when the making or breaking of alliances comes down to a question of bare survival To his friends and satellites Napoleon was a hero and almost a god, whereas he was a bloody-handed, devilish tyrant to his enemies—but friends and enemies changed places overnight and Europe was

caught in a net of secret treaties, diplomatic bargaining, and general distrust

Sometimes Felipe muttered wildly that no power on earth could keep him out of the Peninsula and the Spanish Army any longer, if only his King would go to war. But the King did nothing of the sort, Godoy was, with Napoleon's consent, installed once more as First Minister of His Catholic Majesty, and Felipe's last hope for an honourable return to his own country went up in blue smoke. Yet in spite of those complications we were as happy as kings—and just as bankrupt.

Almost as important for us as Bonaparte's actions were those of another unseen ruler, namely Felipe's administrator in faraway Mexico. Bert Quaile could make rain or sunshine for us, and on him alone it seemed to depend whether we travelled like royalty or like paupers. Whether there was mail from Roberto waiting for Felipe, whether his reports about La Ramita were good or bad, depressing or exhilarating, whether Roberto had duly provided the needed letters of credit or let us down once more—these were the shifting winds which decided our erratic course and shaped Felipe's moods. It took, at best, three and four months for mail from New Spain to arrive in Europe, but what with the insecurity of the seas and the unrest on land, much of this mail never reached the hands of the receiver, and at such times we were drifting without direction, and Felipe became wildly exuberant, which was his very own way of displaying a certain amount of concern. "This Roberto," he would mutter, "this blasted hippopotamus, this confounded ton of lead I'm cursed to drag with me! Here I'm handing him the richest silver vein of the whole world and he doesn't send me enough money to have my shirt washed. But wait till we get to Guanaxuato—"

"What sort of man is this Roberto of yours? Can you trust him?"

"Trust him? Roberto? I can trust him a thousand times more than myself! There lives no other man in all the colonies as honest as Don Roberto. Only a Norteamericano can be of such a stupid honesty. You must know, Caralinda, there is a great difference between the people of the North and us Spaniards. They don't understand what we mean by honour and we can't understand their exaggerated ideas of honesty. Besides being honest, Roberto is my real friend, from the days when we both worked hard in the Cerro de Pasco mines."

in Peru He is a very plebeian person, but a good engineer, and they are very rare in Mexico In fact, without Roberto I could never undertake to sink that deep shaft According to his latest report, we are down to twelve hundred feet by now—”

“Well then—if he is that efficient and honest—

‘Precisely We cannot fail I know that the bonanza is down there, waiting for me, and Roberto knows how to get to it If only he were not so slow and sluggish and outrageously careful, we should be down to two thousand by now ’’

“But you can’t teach patience to a race horse nor speed to a ploughing ox,” I said, smiling at his impatience

“What’s that? Your Protestant Bible again?”

“No A little proverb our coachman Schindler used to quote In Helgenhausen ”

“Forget Helgenhausen, please, forget it, Caralinda Promise me to forget Helgenhausen and I promise you never to think of La Ramita again Curse and confound and blast all minds and veins and bonanzas, and Don Roberto to boot ”

I discovered for the first time that Felipe was not all made of silver when he pawned me in the hotel in Aix-les-Bains New difficulties with passports and travel permits had arisen as soon as we entered the zone occupied by the French, and Felipe had girded himself with his dress sword and trotted from one official to the other, exuding more charm in a day than Madame Pompadour had in a year, or so he put it “Lindita,” he said to me after another one of his futile and fatiguing rounds, “Lindita mía, will you be a good, obedient woman and remain for a few days in this hotel while I go to Bonn to try my luck there? In Bonn I have some friends of influence, the Comte D’Abrazin and also a certain Lieutenant General St Clair, I am sure they will straighten the situation out for me It won’t take me long ”

Instantly all lights were extinguished for me So soon? I thought “So soon you want to leave me alone ?” I said aloud “And only last week you told me we would never, never be apart again, not even for a single day.”

“Nor for a single night, as far as my wishes are concerned But there are situations—”

“I do not care to hear about your situations If you have to go to Bonn, I shall go with you I simply won’t stay alone in this hotel where I can’t poke my head out of the door

without being accosted by one of Napoleon's fresh, victory-bloated colonels or captains "

"If it were possible for me to take you along you know that nothing on earth could prevent me Well, it is not possible"

"But why not? What's the reason?"

"This," he said "This—and tell me a more valid one," he said with a wide, insouciant grin, and turned his pockets inside out, systematically, one by one, and at last he took out his purse and shook it, and a few small coins rolled to the floor and he flung the empty purse on to the table "We are borrasco, my little heart, that's what we miners call it when a mine is utterly and irredeemably exhausted"

I suppose this sudden *dénouement* should have impressed me more than it did, but my mind was on our separation and not on our finances

"But if you have no money it would certainly cost less to take me along than to have me lodge in an expensive hotel," I remonstrated, not unreasonably

"Damn you, woman, don't you comprehend? I simply have to leave you here, you and my sword and my baggage, as a—as a security, don't you understand?"

"You mean I'm in pawn here?" I cried, and then I began to laugh It seemed absurdly funny to me, and Felipe, who had watched me with apprehensive furrows on his forehead, took a deep breath of relief "You may call it that if it amuses you," he said, now laughing too "But don't you worry your little head When I return from Bonn I shall not only have our passports in the best order but I'll also bring bags of louis d'ors with me, you'll see"

"Wouldn't it be simpler to pawn your travel nécessaire instead of your ladylove?"

"My what?"

"The golden travel nécessaire with your escutcheon and the seven-crested coronet, and the golden washbasin and the pitcher and goblet," I said, it was true, I had never seen these treasures, but somehow I had never doubted their existence "Or were they only a legend to strengthen your credit?" I added with a flash of rare insight

"Oh, those—" he said absorbedly, and with two fingers he began gently to trace the outline of my lips as was his habit when he was thinking It was a soft and funnily tender little caress, and when I dream of Felipe today, forty years later,

he still does it sometimes, and then I wake up and do not know why I feel so glad and so relieved of my own weight and age for the rest of the day

"Oh, those," he said "Those were a gift my father sent me when I came of age. Unfortunately I had to leave them behind at the time I was trying to forget you. You know that there are only three methods for a man trying to forget a woman? And each one quite expensive. I drank, I gambled, and I made an effort to amuse myself with girls. A trister amusement I do not wish on my worst enemy. Not even on Manuel Godoy. But don't worry your little head, Caralinda. As soon as Roberto will come forward with some funds——"

Ten days later he returned from Bonn, without passports but with his purse full of money, and Domingo unloaded a pyramid of boxes which contained a splendid trousseau of the newest Parisian fashions for me. I was shocked and delighted. With these daring and revealing garments of the French Empire my transformation from a timid German country countess into a bold and *dégagée mondaine* seemed final and complete. Felipe studied benevolently the effect of his gift "The only good thing that ever came of this Napoleon Bonaparte," he said with a chuckle "I suppose we ought to be grateful to him for taking you little women out of your whalebone cages and petticoat trappings and teaching you that only the ugly ones need to hide what they've got. In Mexico they will call you my *currutaca* and I shall have duels on my hands every time you cross the street."

I paraded before the mirror, inordinately pleased with my long-hipped, slim, transparently exhibitive self "But where did you get all the money for this, Felipe? There are no gold mines in Bonn as far as I know."

"Better, Caralinda. There are faro tables and roulette tables and billiard tables. What I did not win from D'Abrazin, I borrowed."

The hectic fever curves of Felipe's finances neither surprised nor worried me much. I took it for granted that noblemen had debts, the difference was only that in Helgenhausen all such unpoetic and nasty matters had to be kept away from my husband and became my burden, whereas Felipe never permitted me to worry and always found a way out. After a while I was able to recognize the symptoms of his being

borrasco, though The ransomed golden travel nécessaire reappeared piece by piece and disappeared soon after Another reserve were the trinkets and jewels Felipe brought nonchalantly home for me and just as nonchalantly carried away again If matters went from bad to worse Domingo would some nice morning present himself without a single ounce of silver left on his tight trousers, although with his stony dignity undamaged, and with a modest set of horn buttons sewn to his flashy garments I even remember one week of our lowest ebb—this happened later in the year, after the French-Austrian battle of Marengo—when the innkeeper in Padua would not serve us any meals and Felipe had to sell the silver dust he used for his hair powder to buy us a brace of little birds on the market, from which Domingo prepared a most repulsive dish

I am still trying from time to time to analyse what it was that made me feel so perfectly at ease, so completely happy in all the shiftlessness of these first months Now that I had thrown all virtue to the wind, now that I had become a Bad Woman who lived in adventure and fed on illegality, I should have felt dishonoured, in disgrace, and full of remorse Instead of which Felipe made me proud of myself and gave me a sense of freedom, as if I were a little red kite on a broken string, soaring up and up into a boundless sky I think it was that Felipe had no weight, he never dragged, he lived at my side as if the law of gravity did not exist for us, and by his simple being-with-me he lifted the yoke and chain and heaviness of my former years from me

True, during the first week after my escape there had been some qualms and anxiety lest my husband and my brother should pursue and apprehend me But when no obstacle at all was put in our way, when we crossed from one of Germany's small principalities into another without difficulties and I became accustomed to figuring as Demoiselle Babette Schmielz, father unknown, such worrying fears retreated from my waking hours and made themselves a little nest in some of my dreams only Even when the impossibility of travelling through Switzerland and France forced us to retrace our steps and take the road back to Dresden, I forgot to worry Our latest plan was to get from Dresden through Bohemia, Austria, and Italy to the port of Genoa and hence to the Americas Using some prudence for once, Felipe had worked out a fairly

cunning and circumspect route to get us to Dresden without touching Weimar, and thus it came to the evening when we stopped in a small watering place, Bad Koesen

I had heard the place mentioned while my father was still alive, when the saline springs of Koesen had been recommended to him by our doctor, but my father, caught in his duties as the Duke's equerry, had postponed the cure for his inflamed bronchi until it was too late. All day long little memories of my father and my early childhood had intruded themselves into my thoughts, probably because the landscape through which we travelled became more and more familiar. Koesen, where we arrived after sunset, presented itself as a quiet and fairly dull little resort, hospitable in a sleepy way with its white Kurhaus and its whitewashed wooden colonnades leading along the dripping sprays of the Saline. And yet in this tranquil flyspeck of a town I had to make the greatest decision of my life.

After dinner I had repaired to my room to sew a few buttons and ruffles on my wardrobe, for this was a period of low tide in Felipe's purse, when he could not afford a maid for me. For the same reason, I assumed, had Felipe mumbled some apology and directed his steps towards the casino, where presumably a few tables of modest gambling could be found and, with some luck, a few gold pieces won.

I waited for his return until the candle on my night table had almost burned down, and then I fell asleep just as the church clock struck midnight and the night watchman tootled his bleating horn and sang out the hour. Even before I slept deeply enough to begin dreaming I woke up again and saw Felipe standing at my bedside and looking down on me with a curious sadness which he tried hastily to wipe from his face when I opened my eyes, I caught only the last, evasive shred of an expression he had never shown me while I was awake. He was without his coat, in his black satin breeches, his finely pleated shirt open at the neck, and he held a burning candle in his hand. "*Bon sour, m'amie,*" he said softly, as he had said on the evening of the Redoute. I smiled at him and stretched out my arms. He placed the candle on the night table and sat down on my bed.

"How was it? Did you win?" I asked.

"What is that? Ah—yes, I won a little. In fact, I won quite a lot. I found better company and higher stakes than I should."

have expected from the appearance of the place Koesen, of all the confounded towns in this confounded principality!"

He went on looking into my face and I smiled up at him and he didn't smile back, and then a quavering church bell twanged the half-hour

"There were even people from Weimar," he said "People who used to know you Remember a Freiherr von Kiesel? Grey hair, freckles, a handshake like buttermilk?"

"Of course I remember him For mercy's sake—he didn't see me, did he? He doesn't know that I am here with you? If he has seen me, he—" I stammered, hit by a sudden squall of panic

"No, he did not see you He cannot have seen you and he cannot possibly guess that you are here" Felipe hesitated, picked up my hand from the coverlet, turned it palm up, wanted to kiss it, changed his mind, and put it carefully back like a valuable but inanimate object "I must tell you some curious news, Caralinda," he said slowly, "please, don't let it shock you it appears that you are dead and buried"

"That was to be expected For Weimar I must be dead—a woman running away from her husband and family, *sans adieu!* But I don't care, you know that I don't care if I am dead for them!"

He began tracing the lines of my mouth with two fingers, deep in thought

"Look here, Chiquita, what did you tell your husband before you went away?" he asked

"Nothing We had a little quarrel—in fact, I provoked a little quarrel, which was easy enough Poor Albert had a bad conscience, he believed me jealous of his French lady friend, the fool Absurd—but I left it at that because it gave me a good reason to pack my bag and pretend to be off to see my brother, while Albert escorted the Guermontagne back to Jena"

"And then?"

"And then? You know what happened then, my love"

"Did you cry when you left Helgenhausen? Did you give your husband any indication that he would never see you again?"

"How could I? He wasn't even there when I left, and I myself believed that I would be back within a few days I did not know yet what an irresistible seducer I was going to meet in Otternfurt"

I smiled as I remembered my proud exodus from Helgenhausen. I had driven off in our polished calèche, the leather gear gleaming, the horses curried and braided, on the box our head coachman Schindler in his best livery, pelerine greatcoat, hat and boots shining, the cockade with the Driesen colours on the whip, and on the back seat Babette, sparkling with the pleasure of the unexpected outing.

"Going away on a journey, Your Grace?" Wachtmeister Merckel had asked when we passed through the Frauendorf and I had signed my name into *The Book*. Paunchy Old Merckel in his frog-green uniform—always greedy for news, always throwing inexact quotations from the classics about—was a true outcrop of Weimar. As for *The Book*, it lived a malicious life of its own, nobody was allowed to pass one of the four town gates without signing it, which made it the lovers' bane and an inexhaustible source of gossip and speculation for Court and populace.

"I'm visiting my brother in Klein Werra and I shall be back before Sunday. My dappled mare will foal soon and I wouldn't miss the great event, not for a wilderness of monkeys."

"Ah, Shakespeare! A true example of the Great Briton's salty humour," Merckel had said, turning his eyes heavenward, as was the fashion in Weimar whenever genius was mentioned. And I had driven off, shy little Countess Driesen, whom no one would ever suspect of going to a clandestine rendezvous. It was the last I remembered clearly, and whatever followed—stopping at the hut of Babette's mother, changing into Babette's clothes, taking the post chaise to Otternfurt—was accomplished in a curious twilight, in that sleepwalking sure-footedness only known to people whom love befalls like an incurable and deadly sickness.

The church clock struck three quarters, I left my reminiscences and was back in my bed in Bad Koesen, with Felipe's glance resting sternly upon me.

"What is it, Felipe?" I asked, frightened. "Are they—are they after us?"

"No, no, dear heart, be quiet, no bloodhounds have been set on your tracks," he said with a thin little smile. "But there is something incomprehensible. Tell me, what did you write to your husband in that farewell letter?"

"Let me see." I begged him to forgive me—and that he would never see me again—and I told him to feel free to marry

the Guermontagne What else was there for me to write ? Naturally, I did not mention you, it would have seemed too rude—”

“So you invited your husband to commit bigamy, little monkey,” Felipe said thoughtfully, and now he smiled a little

“My thoughts were not so very clear that morning in the Red Boar But as I deserted him, he can divorce me and marry the Guermontagne, can’t he ?”

“What frivolous ideas about the Holy Sacrament of marriage you carry in that little Protestant mind of yours,” he said, and he was only half joking “No—I don’t think he could have divorced you and married the Guermontagne She is a Catholic, isn’t she, and our Church would always consider it to be bigamy, as long as you are alive But, as I told you before you are dead, Caralinda Stone dead, buried, and mourned by a despondent widower who wouldn’t dream of ever marrying again ”

I was used to the absurd little jokes with which Felipe liked to amuse me and himself, not too seldom they were spiced with a few grains of a biting, sharp, strange Spanish cruelty I kept on smiling but felt my lips grow cool under the gentle strokes of his fingers “All right,” I said, “if I am dead—who killed me ?”

“You did, yourself You sent Count Driesen a farewell letter in which you announced that you were going to commit suicide, you made the supreme sacrifice in order to set him free to follow his heart’s desire—or what you believed to be his heart’s desire You went and drowned yourself in the Ilm which, as you will remember, was swollen by the rains and not at all the tame little river it is otherwise Your poor body was carried off by the strong current, swept through the millrace sixteen miles downstream, caught in the wheel, and found, badly mangled and distorted, in the millpond of Oberried, eleven days after you had disappeared You were clad in the shreds of a blue skirt, because in an excess of delicacy you had even borrowed your chambermaid’s garments to commit suicide in But Count Griesen hurried to the place of the tragedy and identified your remains beyond a doubt ” And at this point of his amazing recital Felipe bent over me and with a flicker of his usual impertinence he pulled my nightgown down and placed a kiss on my left breast “He seems to have possessed only a superficial knowledge of how you really look,

chiquitina," he remarked with a lover's typical contempt for the husband, and then he went on "Precluding all possible difficulties the clergy might make, he had you buried on his own grounds and with great funereal pomp and fanfare His grief is sincere and boundless, since you died, he doesn't ever want to see the Guermontagne again, he doesn't want to speak to her or even hear her name mentioned He spends hours and hours at your grave, and his only consolation lies in the poems he writes in memoriam of you *Relata refero* I'm only repeating what Von Kiesel told me in all innocence What do you make of it?"

I do not know what I would have made of it before I had become Felipe's mistress, as for the new Clarinda in her filmy Parisian night chemise—she was a woman who thought first of all What a farce!

"What a farce!" I called out, amused rather than impressed "Out of a nice, full-blooded scandal they make an anæmic, self-denying little tragedy—but that's Weimar for you!"

Felipe shook his head "No self-denial for little Caralinda, hein? No more conscience than a barracuda," he said in mock disgust He left my bedside and began wandering up and down the small room, all rooms seemed small when Felipe moved in them I did not know what a barracuda was, but his reproachful tone made me giggle "You would get quickly tired and bored with me if I were a repentant sinner," I said in the stumbling bit of Spanish I had learned so far By and by his curious news was penetrating into the deeper layers of my mind, but instead of being disturbed or shocked by it I felt relieved The absurd misunderstanding explained at last why my escape had come off with such smoothness and ease If I had planned it and schemed for it and designed it with great forethought and precautions, I would probably never have succeeded

I could picture Poor Albert wallowing in grief, making the most of it and enjoying every tear he cried Up to now he had had to labour hard on the fabrication of artificial sentiments out of which he might form his poems, but now I had supplied him with a rich store of true emotions Who knows, I thought to myself, maybe this will yet make a *real* poet of him I grinned as I surveyed the situation in regard to the Guermontagne Probably I understood Poor Albert better than she did now that he could have her, he did not want her Now that I had become unattainable, he was in love with my shadow

"What are you licking your chops about?" Felipe asked, coming back to my bed and standing over me

"I am pleased with the way everything turned out I am of much better use dead than I ever was alive It is absurd, grotesque, farcical, whatever you want, but I could never have planned it as well as this silly misunderstanding arranged it for us "

Felipe kept looking down upon me with a puzzled expression, and an instant later my light mood left me and I felt a little hollow inside as my mind veered off at a tangent "Strange to think that I shall never know who was the girl in the blue skirt who's lying in my grave—"

"And your husband shedding copious tears over her," Felipe said callously

"She must have been terribly lonely, if no one missed her and no one claimed her body," I said, pity for the lost young creature stinging in my eyes "Why, do you think, she did it ?"

"For a pretty young woman there exists only one reason," Felipe answered "Love If her lover left her—"

Yes, I thought That is true If you had left me, I should have done the same And in that grave, but for the grace of God, might rest Clarinda

The church clock struck One and I could hear the night watchman pass under our window with the shuffle of his boots and the tip tap of his halberd and I waited for the old, old sound of his horn and for his old man's toothless singing-out of the hour , it gave me a sense of tranquil, sheltered orderliness, something that had dribbled out of my life since I was travelling with Felipe I closed my eyes , I was tired and content I was dead and beyond pursuit and persecution But Felipe was not content at all , he began restlessly to wander up and down the small room, with his shadow, long and thin, wandering alongside the wall and stretching up and over the ceiling "What are you going to do now, Clarinda ?" he said "You have the choice whether you want to remain dead or come back to life It is a very rare choice No—wait," he said, not looking at me "Don't make a hasty answer I beg you to think it through to the end and to examine it from all sides It is a very grave decision, and I must stay out of it You have to decide it, you alone "

"What's got into you, Felipe ? You don't sound like yourself I made my decision when I went away with you I don't quite understand what you are driving at "

"Don't you? Look here, Caralinda we are hardly thirty miles from Weimar Why—we are so close you could take the morning coach tomorrow and be back home the day after," he said, speaking not to me but to the dark oblong of the window, and all I could see was his profile, the nostrils of his sharp, straight Saracen nose were dilated and bloodless, like wax It was the first time I came upon this storm signal in the arrogant face

"What would I do in Weimar the day after tomorrow? What makes you talk such nonsense?" I asked, holding my breath "I love you Why are you making all these complications for us?"

He pushed himself away from the window and he came over and took my head between his hands and bent it back and held my eyes with the strength of his, in his widened pupils I could see myself, very tiny, with the flickering, sputtering candle at my side

"How do you know you love me? What do you know of me? Do you love the man I am? Or the man you believe me to be?"

"I didn't know there were two of you"

He gazed at me for another moment and then he pushed my head back on to the pillow and jumped up and went to the window again "I never told you the whole truth about myself," he said with his back turned to me, "but now, before you make your final decision, I want you to know the truth" He paused to suck in air in a deep, long breath "I am a bastard," he then said quietly

I am not sure what confession, what horror, what new Spanish enormity I had expected after so much agitation, now I had trouble not to giggle "It isn't the sort of word I should have used, being a lady of great refinement," I said, holding a bubble of laughter down my throat "But that's probably what makes you so confoundedly attractive"

"You don't want to understand, Clarinda," he said, straightening up and standing over there so stiffly and proudly and miserably erect that I had to think of a waxen image Saint Sebastian offering his chest to the darts of his torturers "I am a bastard, Clarinda," he said with a great ring of defiance in his voice "I am the bastard of Conde Carlos de las Fuentes, one of his bastards, for my father scattered his spawn all over the countryside I am a bastard and an outcast, born out of wedlock I am his kin and blood, maybe more so than his true

sons, but I have no right to the title I assumed Any man may call me a bastard to my face, but even if I kill him for it, that will not make me a true Conde de las Fuentes No, don't say anything now," he added hastily, as I wanted to speak, "let it sink in and think well, *m'amie* You were born a countess and you married a count, you were the Countess Clarinda von Driesen when I met you, and you ran away with the Conde de las Fuentes I beg you to face the truth now and be sincere with yourself would you have run away as easily with a simple Felipe Contreras—a commoner and a bastard?"

I was still catching my breath Yes, I thought, a thousand times yes! Under any name, whoever you may have been, whatever you may have done, whatever your past or future—I would have gone with you I could have as little resisted the force that swept me towards you as I could have stopped a lightning bolt with my bare hands I was lost and bonded over to you from the first moment It was that sort of love which only the blessed and the condemned know What shocked and hurt me was not Felipe's tainted birth but that he had lied about it and outfitted himself with silly trimmings like an impostor He should have been too proud for that But this I kept to myself, and when I thought I had regained sufficient control over the tone of my voice I said lightly "If you are Felipe Contreras, so am I Babette Schmielz, does that make us equals?" There came no answer, and I remembered our stocky, burly Duke who represented all I knew of royalty and I added "You don't need false pretensions, you are the only true *Grand Seigneur* I ever met, Felipe"

He waved this aside with a little flick of his hand "You mean that I can ape my father and that I learned a few elegant tricks from my former friends, the actors and jugglers False pretensions—but, Caralinda, how can I explain to you why I am using a title that is not really mine? Without a title—I don't know how to express it I feel naked without a title I don't feel like my real self If it is a lie, it is one that has grown into my flesh and bones and become part of me, that seems truer to me than the truth From the time I can remember I thought of myself as a Fuentes You must try to understand how it was, Clarinda It wasn't as if my father did not want to acknowledge me, he went to very great trouble to have my birth legitimized But his wife was a devil of jealousy and bigotry, and her family, and even my father's own mother,

were on her side because they thought it their duty to shield her and her children and their measly inheritance. What do I care about the ridiculous possessions of the Fuentes family? Some day I shall own ten times the wealth the Fuentes ever had and they might well yet come begging to me to make me pay their debts and buy the Castillo back for them. Some day——”

He swung around and stood, taut and rigid, against the dark oblong of the window as he said “Some day, so help me God, I shall have a title of my own and prove to them all that I am a truer Conde de las Fuentes than the two milksops and wastrels who came out of the womb of that old goat my father is married to”

I don’t know why it is that almost every man has two lives the one which he is able to share with others, with his parents, his family, his children, and his wife. The life in which there is a place for play, for women, for love. The other is all his own and only that one is real to him, it is the unbending core and substance of a man’s being, his thoughts, his ideas, his dreams, his ambitions, his own innermost self. Up to that night I had known only that half of Felipe that was my lover and my playful, willing companion, now, in a blinding flash of perception, I could see the whole man and comprehend the three pieces of which his stubborn obsession and his life’s entire plan consisted

“I will sink a deeper shaft than anyone ever dared and I will prove that there are greater riches in these mines than anyone ever dreamed”

“And when I am rich I shall return to Spain and be received at the Escorial and honoured by my King”

“And someday, so help me God, I shall have a title and prove to the world that I am a true Conde de las Fuentes”

One followed from the other, and there was a definite logic and order in the whole design. But it was a man’s way of thinking and a man’s striving towards a man’s goal, I, being a woman, suddenly knew that I was born much older and wiser than Felipe would ever be. I almost had to smile, for there was something immature in his pursuit, the defiance of a youngster who had been hurt in a tussle and now would go and show them all! I stared up at the ceiling and up there I saw a long straight stretch of a road cutting through a dry yellow country which was Spain, and in the distance a minute figure was wandering away, with a little bundle tied to a stick over his shoulder and that brave little figure was my Felipe, a hurt,

spiteful, pigheaded little boy flinging out challenges at all the world To see my masterful lover suddenly reduced to this pathetic small figure made me all soft and melting inside, for the quality of pity had not entered my love up to that moment "Thank you for telling me, I am glad you did, dear heart, now I can love you so much better," I said under my breath, and stretched my arms towards his defiant back He pushed himself away from the window and, throwing himself over me, powerful man-wave, he buried his head in the hollow of my shoulder I began stroking his head and the back of his neck and then I discovered with a cool, slow shock that Felipe was crying I lay very still, I did not dare move, I listened into the throbbing silence and felt a bit of moisture soak into the sleeve of my thin chemise and I was strangely and floatingly transformed into a mother with a helpless little child resting against her breast At last he lifted his head and, bracing his arms on both sides of me, he raised himself, looked down into my face, and said with clenched teeth four times in succession "Damn ! Damn, oh dammit ! Damn !"

The curse seemed to restore some of his usual bounce and springiness, he rolled over and, lying at my side, he came out with the most unexpected remark "I often felt like killing that bitch of a mother of mine, and sometimes I regret I didn't do it," he said in Spanish, of which I had begun to understand a little, and it shocked me to the core "How can you say such a cruel thing ?" I cried, and withdrew a bit He gave his short, condescending laugh "Probably she felt the same about me, she would not have been the first mother wishing to get rid of her bastard," he said with great bitterness "Don't speak about her, then, if that is the way you feel," I told him He sat up and stared at me so fiercely that the blue fire of his eyes seemed to singe my skin like a burning glass "And why shouldn't I speak about her ? Do you think I am ashamed of my mother ? Well, I am proud of her, and don't you ever forget that !" he shouted

I had learned by then that Felipe's mind seldom moved in a straight line- but in erratic leaps like a knight on a chessboard "Where is your mother now ? Shall I meet her ? Is she, too, in Mexico ?" I asked, taking his hand into mine

"My mother ? No She lives in Spain In the convent of Santa Ursula near Burgos My mother is a nun "

This was another sample of the amazing kind of information

with which Felipe surprised me ever so often I did not know what to make of it or what to say Throughout the years I have kept perpetually wondering how two people could be so close to each other and yet such strangers We had no common ground, not our country, not our language, not our past, and even our future was only a great question mark We came from two opposite corners of the universe, and what belonged to both of us together was only this present, this moment, this priceless now

"They say my mother was the most beautiful young girl in Alquezar and she came from a very good family, anybody in Navarra and Aragonia will tell you that the Contreras are one of the oldest and most honourable families of the province," Felipe said "My grandfather was the alcalde of the town, but he resigned when he felt that my mother had ruined his good name My father had seduced her before she was eighteen, and when he was called to the Escorial she went with him and lived happily and handsomely with him in Madrid as his mistress But when the Fuentes family selected a wife for him and he got betrothed, my mother left him without letting him know that she was pregnant, the proud bitch She returned to Alquezar, where my grandfather shut her away in the house almost like a prisoner That is where I was born Does it bore you to hear of my childhood ?"

"Don't ask silly questions Go on, go on," I said eagerly It was the first time Felipe spoke of his early years, and the children I had not borne made me gasp with hungry tenderness for the little boy he had been

"The first thing I remember is my mother kneeling before a painted chest, taking out dresses, unfolding and refolding the silky garments she never would wear again Just took them out and looked at them and listened to their rustle and put them away again and let the top of the chest fall shut with a report like that of a musket Afterwards I would squat there and study the pictures on the lid and all round There was Danielo in the lions' den and the three men in the fiery oven But my mother would push me away because she did not want to see me 'Get out from under my eyes, I do not want to see you !' was the text I heard every day and every hour I went out into our small patio, but to me it seemed very large and full of hazards and I stumbled often on its cracked, uneven flaggings and hurt my knees In the centre was a well covered

with a heavy stone slab, and when our man Euchario shoved that slab aside to let down the bucket, worms and slugs crawled out from the mossy rim of the well. There was a heavy nail-studded door locking us away from the street, and I was strictly forbidden to leave our patio or even to peer out on to the Plaza. Only on my mother's hand did I ever go outdoors, across the Plaza and into the church, to early-morning Mass. It was cold and dark on the Plaza, and still colder and darker in the church, and there was a dank smell of old incense and wilted flowers. My mother would dip her fingers into the font and make an ice-cold cross over me and pull me down on my knees and make me pray and ask forgiveness for my sins and hers. By the time we left the church the sun would be coming up and there would be more people about and my mother would walk stiffly past them, all in black and veiled like a nun even then, behind the portales some ragamuffins would hide and call after me 'Your Excellency! Your Grace! Vuestra Merced! El Conde de las Fuentes! Bastard!' And my mother would stiffen still more and walk, very proud and erect, and yank me with her, and Euchario would close the heavy door shut and lock it with an enormous bolt as soon as we were safely home again.

"But the summer when I was five the real Conde, my father, came to Alquezar with the intention of taking me away from my mother, or so she told me later. I had never seen as tall and handsome a man nor such magnificent clothes as he wore, except on the statues of some of the Señores Santos when they were carried in the Easter Sunday procession, and therefore I thought that he was a Señor Santo too. He came clattering on horseback into our patio and threw the reins to his groom, who also had a horse, and both horses were tied to an iron ring on one of the pillars, and I just stood there with my whole hand stuffed into my mouth for wondering. The Conde did not notice me but strode past me into the house, and then there was much disputing and crying in the sala, my grandfather came out carrying his old musket in his hand and he was shaking all over and suddenly he dropped to the stone floor and clutched at his chest and our man Euchario had to lift him up and carry him to his bed. It did not seem to bother my father much that my grandfather had suffered a fit, because he swung me high up into the air, and then he handed me to his groom as if I were a parcel, and the groom put me on his

horse as big as a mountain and I had my first riding lesson right then and there, on the way to the Castillo

"That whole summer and autumn I lived with my father in the Castillo, and a happier six months no boy ever had. But one night my mother climbed up the cliffs where the goats were roaming and so came into the room where I slept and carried me off, and then my father had his men kidnap me a second time and bring me back to him. Clearly, I did not understand any of it, because I was only five, but I often felt pulled back and forth like a bone over which two dogs are fighting. Even now I can sometimes recall that feeling of how they had their fangs into me, my mother and my father, and neither of them considered me as a creature with a soul of his own. In the end my mother won, she had promised me to the church, because that was the only atonement she could offer for her sin and the only way of paying for her salvation from purgatory, hell, and eternal damnation. And thus I came to San Esteban."

I waited, but apparently he had come to the end of his fragmentary autobiography. He smiled at me, relaxed and amiable now, and pulled my night chemise from my neck and opened its coquettish three Parisian bows, idly he cupped his left hand around my breast to fondle it as he added as an afterthought "And now she is a nun, my proud, beautiful, hard bitch of a mother, she took the veil while I ran away from priesthood, for now she has to atone not only for her own sins but for mine also, and that will take a mighty lot of atoning, Caralinda. But as you will go to hell in any case, my little heathen, I shall gladly join you there."

It seemed almost sacrilegious to hear him speak of hell and atonement with all the serious belief of a devout Papist and have him caress my breast at the same time. Burning down, the candle had sputtered fitfully and went out with a last feeble little flicker, leaving only the scent of hot wax in the dark unfamiliar room. Bad Koesen, Hotel zu den Drei Mohren. Another inn, another room, another bed in yet another station of our wayward journey. The night stood outside, breathless and expectant, a muffled and veiled night, heavy and large like a pregnant woman. Then the clock from the steeple struck Two and the shuffling footfall of the night watchman went past under the open window with the thump-thump of his halberd and the very faintest reflection of his lantern wandering past the house fronts across the narrow

street He took his stand at the corner, blew his horn and sang out the hour, and so went farther and farther away into the night, carrying the old, old words and melody from corner to corner into the distance When the last of it had faded away the silence became still deeper, and now I could even hear the small murmur of a fountain on the market place beyond the church as its thin jet of water spouted into the stone trough Very, very clearly I remember all that, the weight of the heavy feather coverlet I had tossed off, the carving of the oaken bedpost my fingers touched in the dark, the faint outline of the white muslin curtain which a limp night breeze plucked once and then let go again with the faintest trace of a rustle And all this, the air, the town, the bed, the clock, the watchman's step and song and lantern, meant Germany, it meant still-being-at-home and leaving all of it for the unknown faraway and never coming back, and there was a sudden fit of panic and being too tired to speak or understand French, floatingly, swimmingly tired, and thinking, maybe I've lost my mind and don't know it I am dead and didn't know it, either And there was the strange Indian herb fragrance of Felipe's hair, and maybe I'm only dreaming all this and I will open my eyes and wake up in Helgenhausen, and by now it is too late in the year to plant strawberries

"Now that you know who I am, do you still want to come to Mexico with me ?" Felipe asked, pulling me back from the rim of the dark pond of exhaustion into which I had been gliding It had that fever quality, every detail almost too clear, too transparent, every conception sharpened to an almost unbearable point—and yet the whole was without reality and the room was without walls as rooms are in dreams

"Mexico ?" I murmured Oh yes, I thought, drunk with fatigue, we are going to Mexico I could see all the things Felipe had promised me if I went with him to Mexico The streets were paved with silver, a woman who also was a mountain slept on a bed of snow-white clouds, suspended in a dark blue sky, trees and ferns and flowers the like of which I had never seen when awake hung in cascading abundance over me, and Felipe was a prince and I was a queen with a crown in my hair and a crowd of countless Indios was kneeling before me, head on head, and all of them looked up to me with Domingo's broad, devoted, greenish, pockmarked face and I thought They all are wearing the same mask, and then there came a gust of wind and

blew a shower of light sweet petals into my hair and on to my cheeks and lips and then I found that they were not petals but small, weightless kisses with which Felipe tried to keep me awake and I heard him say with a little laugh "You mustn't fall asleep just now, my love You must make the most important decision of your life and mine do you still want to go to Mexico with me ?"

Did you lie to me about Mexico too ? I wanted to ask him, but it came out as a different question "Will there be a fig tree ?" I muttered in somnolent confusion Goethe had once told me about a fig tree in Italy and to me it had ever since meant the rich faraway

"A thousand fig trees A million fig trees, if you want them," Felipe said I could see them all, a million fig trees, a forest of fig trees growing all around my grave in the park of Helgenhausen, and I broke their fruit and felt the sweet milky sap trickle over my fingers and I said with deep contentment "That's good Then I shall go with you to Mexico "

I woke up for another moment when Felipe slipped off his clothes and lay down at my side and took me in his arms, with such gentleness and prudence as though I were not his woman but his child On my skin I could feel the imprint of the scapulary he wore around his neck, he took my hand and put my fingers around that scapulary and closed his own hand over mine, and I heard him say in Spanish "So may God punish me and take my life if I do not make you the happiest and richest woman in all New Spain Amen "

The church clock struck the half-hour, somewhere a premature bird chirped a first faint morning question and fell asleep once more and the night came to its end

PART TWO

"**L**OS ZOPILOTES," said Felipe, who was standing behind me On the deck of the Spanish brigantine *El Corazón de Jesús*, which had just dropped anchor at the shoddy anchorage of Vera Cruz The ugly, big black birds seemed to be everywhere, they were sitting in huddles on the walls and gates and flat white roofs of the town, they were hanging like festoons from the towers and crenellations of the fortress of San Juan de Ulúa, they were wheeling overhead and dropping here and there like a hail of black rocks on to the shores where countless others of their kind stood motionless, like strange dark plants rooted in the wet sands

"But where is Orizaba?" I asked, brushed by a small foreboding shiver in all the brooding heat To get a clear view of Mexico's highest mountain at the moment of arrival was accepted on faith as a most important good omen by superstitious sailors and enlightened travellers alike Felipe pointed vaguely into the distance There was no sun, no sky, only a mass of low, slate-coloured clouds scudding inland before the furnace blasts of a battering wind "It will clear up presently," Felipe said apologetically "It always does Have patience, dear heart"

"No Orizaba then," I said, trying to shake off my depressed humour "Zopilotes instead Do they bring bad luck, your zopilotes?"

"You're getting as superstitious as a gypsy, Caralinda No, they are honest, diligent, useful birds Without her zopilotes Mexico would choke in her own refuse and dirt In your country, I believe, they're called vultures"

In my country there are no vultures, I wanted to say, but did not say it Since I had become a rambler in the world I had learned not to make comparisons and was trying to erase the words "at home" from my vocabulary In Weimar vultures existed only in poetic metaphors where they were for ever symbolically gnawing at poor Prometheus's liver I myself

had never thought of vultures as something that existed in reality. But here they were, as common and unpoetic as so many street cleaners' brooms. During our voyage across the lawless ocean I had become acquainted with many things which to the poets of Weimar and their soulful readers were only well-sounding words. But, you dear poets in your small studios, under your low roofs, in the musty security of your lives, vultures are real. Storm, danger, plague, murder, death, all real.

Even now, with the morning's perilous navigating through the shallow waters between the sand bars off the Mexican coast accomplished and with the ship at anchor, we were not out of danger. I knew that much when I saw Felipe's hand steal inside his shirt to touch his scapulary. This was his own unconscious danger signal, but he had no idea that I had spied it out. He had no idea, this lover of mine, how much I knew about him by now, about the good and the bad, the truth and the falsehood, the courage and the fears in the depth of his heart.

I followed his somewhat nervous glance and saw that a boat displaying the red-and-yellow flag of Spain had rowed alongside and some gaudily uniformed officials were being shoved up the Jacob's ladder by eager brown hands. Felipe grew restive. "Now you'd better go down below and put on your red dress, Blanquita," he told me. "For now we'll have to attend to the formalities." With a queerly old-fashioned courtly motion he offered me his gold-braided sleeve to rest my hand upon, since Louisiana, where we had first touched Spanish territory, Felipe had taken to wearing ruffled shirts and frock coats with huge gold-braided cuffs which made him look very handsome and absurdly eighteenth-century. As he led me thus toward the companionway I felt as though we were dancing a gavotte at Marie Antoinette's ill-fated Court.

As for the nineteenth century, it joined us at that moment in the person of the Licenciado Pedro Arrellano. The Licenciado was a thin, slightly shortsighted young man, always dressed simply and somewhat sloppily in black broadcloth. He had a nervous habit of clearing his throat and wiping a bit of perspiration from his badly shaved upper lip, which was taut with the slightly tortured ironical smile that seemed the international mark of young freethinkers, and although Felipe sometimes played a game of chess with him to while

away the time, he had only a sharp dislike and a mild contempt for the Licenciado. There were three good reasons for it: the Licenciado was a Mestizo, ("imagine—not a white man, not even a Criollo, a Mestizo studying law! What is New Spain coming to?" was Felipe's comment) moreover, he had a vague air of Jacobinism about him. And he always beat Felipe at chess.

"Your servant, madame," the Licenciado said, and without paying any further attention to me he turned to Felipe and pointed at the three officials who were just climbing aboard. "Bueno, Señor Contreras, here we have the high authorities, our Health Department in all its glory. If these dressed-up monkeys should find out about the two men we buried in canvas off Jamaica they will either keep us quarantined until judgment day or squeeze from us every last real in our purses. I am afraid we shall have to talk to them in the only language they understand." He rubbed his thumb and forefinger in an eloquent gesture which Felipe pretended not to notice. "You will excuse us, Licenciado," he said not too politely, and shoved me towards the companionway. "Your servant, madame," the Licenciado said with his tormented smile, and stepped aside to let me pass.

Felipe had done his best to keep from me the ugly rumour about the two sailors who, it was claimed, had died of the plague, but I had learned about it anyway through Señora Filomena Marfa de Mendoza y Peleón with whom I was sharing the only cabin of the brigantine that had brought us from Louisiana to these shores. The señora had tried very hard to impress me with her close connections and, indeed, friendships within the aristocracy of the colonies, but I could well picture the back street in Sevilla from where she must have come, for the voice of the markets and hovels is the same all over the world. However, I could practise my Spanish on her and she was lively, curious, and quite good company, in spite of the heavy perfumes and the still heavier attacks of mal de mer with which she filled the scant space of our cabin. To my surprise, Felipe was greatly pleased about our budding friendship and treated the señora not like the hussy she obviously was but like a duchess of flawless ancestry.

"How fortunate an acquaintance," he had said delightedly. "Knowing the señora is a small bonanza by itself. Don't you understand, Chiquita? She has the Virrey's ear."

"And what do we need the Virrey's ear for?" I had asked in my innocence

"Mercury—among other things," Felipe had answered enigmatically, and I let it go at that

As I opened the cabin door below, the sharp smell of spirits of ammonia stung in my eyes and Doña Filomena was dissolving all over the cramped, disrupted quarters, while her maid Frasquita was attempting to push more and more things into a creaking, overcrowded, and protesting hamper, at the same time calling the wrath of the Lord upon any health department that might plan to hold us in quarantine. The señora joined her with a mixture of devout prayers and succinct profanity, and I listened with amusement and admiration to the outburst of the Spanish temperament. The ear of the Virrey, I thought, and was conveniently at hand with salts and sympathy when the doña arranged to faint into my arms. Mercury, I thought, as I bedded her down on her berth and left her there with a slice of lemon in her gasping mouth which made her look somewhat like a boiled and garnished salmon, for the señora had applied a heavy layer of pink paste over her swarthy complexion for the solemn occasion of our arrival.

After putting a cold compress over her eyes I began to dress myself according to Felipe's directions. Reluctantly I slipped into the harness of a boned, puffed-up carmoisine-red brocade dress, as they were still worn at the Escorial, braided my hair and wound it like a coronet around my head, and immediately broke out in streams of perspiration. Not only was this heavy dress most unsuitable for the heat of these shores, but it also seemed a piece of tasteless ostentation to me who had been brought up in surroundings where any ostentation was considered vulgar and ridiculous.

"Why all the primping, Felipe? Why do you want me to dress up as though we were going to a ball? Do you think it fitting for me to arrive without a hat and attired like the diva of a travelling theatrical troupe?"

"Cover that golden crown of yours? Are you crazy, my blonde one? Let all of Mexico see how blonde you are and how white! And don't forget that you are a princess now and that they will expect you to dress like one!"

To that I could only sigh. It was true, I was a princess now. I had a new passport, legally acquired and duly stamped and signed La Princesse Marie Claire Pontignac, daughter of

Prince Édouard Laurent Pontignac, of Pontignac-sur-Butte, Auvergne, France The ludicrous little ceremony in which the Prince Édouard Laurent Pontignac had legally adopted me as his daughter had taken place in La Nouvelle Orléans while we were waiting for some ship to take us across the Gulf to Vera Cruz I had known that deals of this kind were nothing unusual and many impoverished French émigrés were not at all disinclined to adopt some title-greedy parvenu against a consideration But I was born a Countess von und zu der Werra, and while I hadn't minded travelling as Babette Schmielz, I felt that this purchased nobility was an insult and a disgrace I had cried, pleaded, fought—and in the end I had lost and given in The trouble was that Felipe did not understand me at all, while I understood him only too well As he couldn't introduce me as the Countess I was, he had taken care that I shouldn't enter Mexico as his obscure maîtresse but as a princess, a lady of rank and title and, furthermore, as a pathetic victim of the French Revolution and a natural enemy of Napoleon, whose very name was despised by all right-thinking men in New Spain

And now I was waiting in my carmoisine brocade and with my splendid passport to live up to my spurious title I could not stand it any longer down below and went on deck to search for Felipe "Where is your master?" I asked Domingo, whom I found supervising two huge Blacks who were assembling our baggage The Indio only shrugged It annoyed me that Domingo never spoke to me, never answered my questions nor even looked into my face Probably it was beneath his precious dignity to talk to a mere woman

I went to the railing and curiously looked down at the native craft which crowded around the *Corazón de Jesús* like so many scampering small brown beetles around the large clumsy body of a bumble-bug Everything was brown down there laughing faces, raised hands of vendors holding up all sorts of fruit and fish, brown sails, brown nets swinging out with cargo in them Even the harsh cries of the native voices seemed to have a brown quality to them Suddenly my eyes were caught by a patch of purplish blue in all the browns a boat loaded high with sacks, among which two men were manœuvring The sacks were blue, the chests of the men were blue, their arms, their hands, their faces

"Indigo," the Licenciado Arrellano said "Indigo from

Guatemala to be shipped to the Peninsula" I had not noticed that the young Mexican had sidled up to me at the railing "Vera Cruz might seem a poor excuse for a port to you, madame," he went on, "but more than half of the riches of the world are shipped out from here. The bitter joke of it is that the more gold and silver Spain takes out from her colonies the poorer she gets. Backbreaking taxes, bribery, monopolies, injustice, and corruption! Ah yes, madame, Mexico is the strong young daughter of a very old, very sick, very bad mother."

I was wondering how to get away from the political oration which seemed boring and in poor taste to me, when, thank heaven, Felipe appeared out of nowhere.

"Are you ready to go ashore?" he called to me, he was radiant, happily excited, and did not seem any worse for the heat. Only when he noticed the young Mestizo at my side he frowned and Arrellano promptly pulled away from me. "Your servant, madame," he said coldly "Hasta luego, Señor Contreras"

My stomach felt very unsettled as Felipe handed me down the ladder and into the longboat, fortunately the wind abated and the choppy small waves were flattening out as we danced towards the shore, oars creaking and oarsmen singing to the rhythm of their strokes. At last we reached the slick oily waters where a forest of masts grew from a swaying tangle of fishing craft, and a few minutes later our boat was fastened to a jetty.

On the square outside of the town walls a group of men were just in the process of receiving, with great flourish, the Doña Filomena and helping her into a litter. Some of them wore uniforms, others outmoded gold-braided coats and satin breeches like Felipe himself, and all of them displayed the powdered hair, or even wigs, of those who feared and hated the Jacobins. Altogether, landing in Mexico seemed like being transported back some fifty years into a period that was gone and past ever since the French Revolution. The planks of the jetty rose and fell under my feet, and even as I trod upon the flagstones of the wharf the ground kept on falling and rising as though I were still aboard ship. Great heavens, I thought, this is not the moment to get seasick, and I brought up my very best Court manners, my best Spanish, and commanded my recalcitrant stomach to behave.

There was a flurry of titles as Felipe introduced the gentlemen to me, a flurry of names, each one sounding like something out of grand opera. The square between pier and town wall became a stage, with myself in the centre. I heard Felipe grandiloquently present me as "La Principesa Pontignac whose dear father entrusted his daughter into my hands before he died and who is seeking a refuge from the assassins of France in this our blessed Colony." At this an appreciative murmur rose, there were bows and compliments, hats were doffed in sweeping courtesy, and hands were pressed to braided, embroidered, and decorated chests in fervent assurances of utter devotion and unlimited hospitality. A portly, overfed, over-dressed dignitary in red and gold, Don Porfirio Bustamante, El Mayor del Consulado, made a sonorous welcome speech. If I understood his lisping Spanish correctly, the port and town of Vera Cruz, the Fort of San Juan de Ulua, his own heart and house and possessions were laid down at my feet and put at my disposal.

The next thing I remember was Felipe taking a deep breath and saying "Gracias a Dios, everything went well. You enchanted them all and I'm terribly proud of you, my Blanquita." We had entered Vera Cruz through a gate flanked by lackadaisical guards and loafing soldiers, and Domingo, walking ahead of us, made a narrow lane through the dense crowd that pushed around us. Never had I dreamed that a crowd could be as grimy, tattered, and ragged as the one that was engulfing us. There were loafers and beggars of every description, naked little boys and incredibly old and wrinkled ancients, the crippled, the blind, the miserable wretches shaking in convulsions, frothing at the mouth. Whining voices sang out blessings or curses, leprous arm stumps were held up, eyeless faces lifted to us, noseless skulls exhibited their sores, and an old crony clamped with haggard arms on to my brocade skirt and pressed her oozing lips to the hem of it. A surging wave of misery and disease, and all these faces so very dark and deadly alien and savage and menacing, whether they smiled or cried or only stared at me in stupid curiosity. Only at that moment did I feel what it meant to be white and blonde and singled out. Something like panic came over me and the white walls of the house turned black.

"What is it, dear heart?" Felipe asked, as I was clutching at his sleeve.

"Nothing The heat—a little dizziness—" I smiled up to him and he smiled back, a queerly cramped little smile not quite his own

We broke out of the encircling, staring, gaping crowd, and he took a good breath "You had me worried for a moment, Caralinda By the end of September the little flurry of fevers they have in Vera Cruz is usually over, besides, it is not contagious," he said eagerly "I assure you, it is not How goes it with the *vómito prieto*?" he called to the coachman who was waiting for us with an enormous, gaudily painted, clumsy vehicle in whose harness two morose, brass-jingling mules were dozing The man shrugged indolent shoulders "Pues—regular," he answered Felipe lifted me into the coach, Domingo took his seat on the box, and we went off on squeaking wheels

This, then, was Mexico the splendour of the Plaza, framed by palaces and arcades and dominated by the proud, domed cathedral, and the abject poverty of hovels and bamboo huts sunk into the quagmire of squalid side lanes The pomp of Spanish uniforms and pearl-embroidered strutting merchants' wealth, and the deep nakedness of the people Priests in black soutanes and shovel hats brushing past huddles of equally black zopilotes fighting with mangy dogs over some stinking carcass High clerics in their shimmering regalia on their way to give some rich man extreme unction, and sandalled friars in tattered robes hastening to do the same merciful service for the poor Plinking of guitars and plump little harps under grilled windows, in the pulquerías and cantinas and on the fringe of the market, old women muttering their prayers, young women giving the breast to their infants, women on doorsteps pat-patting the tortilla, women carrying round earthen water jugs on their shoulders with a grace as old as the Bible, a girl in a doorway laughs, a youth sings of unrequited love, a child cries, a drunken man mutters curses to himself Steel-blue clumps of flies on meat and fruit and food in market stalls, armies of ants in battle order on tiled floors, wedding dance of mosquitoes in the air, bugs, insects, vermin, spiders, and scorpions, all the creeping, biting, maddening, itching pests of the tropics The sour smell of quickly rotting fruit, smell of a thousand cigarrillos, mixed, pungent, lovely smell of small wood fires and burning charcoal and spiced food and roasting corn and chocolate and hot oil Saltiness of the sea, masculine smell of

tarred planks and sweat and sacking, sweetness of oiled blue hair and perfumed strolling, smell of decay and life and death and fertility mingling in one And, hovering over all these smells, the stringent odour of the sickness and of the poor ignorant superstitious people's efforts to smoke it out

Because, if this was not an epidemic but just a regular little flurry of the yellow fever, there was something too deeply sinister underlying the apparently normal life of the streets Twice we almost collided with the tumbrel which came on two huge round slabs of wheels creaking through the streets, halting here and there and again, to collect some stiff cold body wrapped in a white sheet or in a brown mat And the man who was staggering along a church wall and then, suddenly and horribly, cried out, flung his arms gropingly into the air, and dropped down in a heap like a bundle of old clothes with no body left in it—this man was not drunk as I first believed, but dying before my very eyes A small patch of dark brown liquid which he had thrown out with his last gasp spread on the ground under him and he was left there, lying in a lonely circle of isolation as everyone hastened around the stricken one, making the sign of the cross and muttering a prayer and leaving him to the hooded men and the creaking tumbrel

And thus began the strange odyssey of my first day in Mexico

The Posada de San Rosario where we went first was a house of neglected appearance, and Domingo had to skip over a hill of night slop thrown on the street, before he could reach the closed door and pound on it After a while it opened and a lethargic man with dim, heavy eyes appeared In all the heat he was wrapped to his neck in a serape, and his part of the conversation consisted mostly of shaking his head and shrugging his shoulders Behind him, in the doorway, a huddle of children of all sizes crouched on the floor, all of them wrapped up, all of them with the dim, heavy eyes of a malarial fever Felipe cursed to himself and left the coach to hold a brief consultation with Domingo Then the door of the posada closed again, Domingo took his place on the box, and Felipe returned to my side

"It seems they don't take in any guests, the wife is sick and the man is too lazy to accommodate us," he said angrily
"Well, it doesn't matter"

"The children looked sick too Who is nursing them?" I

asked Felipe gave me a glance of great astonishment "Who cares?" he said absently "Who cares, Chiquita?" Well, I do, I thought rebelliously Felipe had compressed his lips and fallen into meditation "We shall simply go to the house of my friend, Don Alonso Peralta, and spend the night there All my business matters and transactions in the port are entrusted to his hands and he will be expecting me I'm surprised he didn't welcome us at the wharf, but then, he is a very occupied man It was stupid of me not to take you to the Casa Peralta directly Forgive me, Hijita, will you?"

But when we came to the glum, proud façade of the Casa Peralta we found the shutters down, the intangible emptiness that marked all houses ravaged by the yellow fever Even the little flame in the red glass cup under the little Madonna over the door had burned out, and the lack of this devout little flicker, more than anything else, told of the tragedy within

An early swift evening hung out its black crape while Domingo was pounding on the silent, unresponsive door We were still waiting, unresolved, when the tumbrel passed by on creaking wheels One of the hooded men called out from behind his muffling mask that Don Alonso, as well as his daughter-in-law, by the will of God, had succumbed more than two weeks ago, but that the son, Don Enrique Peralta, had stayed well and had left town to retire to their hacienda near Xalapa

By now I was immeasurably tired and dizzy, my head ached, my eyes burned, I had seen too much, the day had lasted many years, and never had there been a more wilted carmoisine-red brocade dress in all New Spain I began to get quarrelsome

"Why don't we simply go to an hotel?"

"There is no hotel in Vera Cruz, little stupid one This is not Venice or Paris"

"No inn, no hospice, no place to rest?"

"Mesones, yes, but you wouldn't care to sleep on the floor with muleteers and their mules"

"Back on board ship, then?"

"Impossible The ship has been taken to the Isla de los Sacrificios, in quarantine"

"But where do travellers stay overnight in this hospitable Mexico of yours?" I asked, getting angry and somewhat desperate

"If I were alone there would be dozens of my bachelor friends to invite me into their homes. The difficulty is that you are a lady. There are very few ladies travelling about, you understand."

"There is this Mendoza woman, where does she spend the night?"

"That's an entirely different case. Doña Filomena enjoys the personal protection of the Virrey, and she is a very religious lady. She is the guest of the Mother Superior at the Monastery of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is quite understandable that the nuns are most happy to put her up."

"And the nuns wouldn't take me in for one night?"

Felipe hesitated with the answer, and there was a tight, small silence between us. "No, Caralinda, *you* they wouldn't take," he said quietly.

It was dark by now, still hotter than before, still no sky, no stars, no Orizaba, no air to breathe. I took my hand away from Felipe.

"What is it, dear heart?" he asked.

"Nothing. I am tired, I wish I were dead."

Maybe I shall be dead soon, something thought in my throbbing head. Maybe I shall die of the plague and be sewn in canvas and dumped overboard, or I shall die of the vomito prieto and be stacked up neatly with twenty other stiff cold bodies and buried in their company. Then I began to laugh, because it didn't matter. I had been buried long ago, in my own pretty grave in Helgenhausen. And then the coach stopped and jolted me out of my daze, and the rest of the evening was only a jumble of fragments.

I remember that Felipe went into the cathedral to pray, which announced to me how worried he must be about me. I crept in after him, thinking it lovely that Catholic churches were open at all hours to anyone who needed solace. Felipe did not know that I had followed him. I watched him dip his fingers into the holy font and cross himself and genuflect and walk soundlessly through the high, tall, shadowy nave towards one of the side altars where there were many flowers and candles in front of a dark painting. I watched him kneel down and rest his forehead on his folded hands and pray, lost in a deep absorption which I envied him bitterly. The cathedral was cool and restful and I began to feel less pain in my head and perhaps I was not going to die of the fever after all. There was the scent

of cold incense and hot wax and tired lilies, and I knelt down in one of the last benches, wishing I could be as securely at home in this foreign church as Felipe was

I remember, much hazier, being admitted into the palace of Don Porfirio Bustamante, the portentous orator of the same morning who had so eloquently and grandly put the town and port of Vera Cruz at my feet. There were uniformed guards in front of the haughty-looking palace, questions were asked, money exchanged hands, at last the heavy door creaked open. A large lantern on iron chains shed a trickle of light upon the tiled floor and the thick walls of the entrance. Beyond arches and arcades I perceived the patio oleander trees in huge earthen pots, a walled cistern in the centre, a broad stairway beyond that patio swinging out and up to both sides, where a black servant quickly lit two more lanterns for the late and unexpected visitor. Felipe walked quickly up the stairs, the silver dust in his hair glimmered as he passed under the light, and when his steps faded out I felt utterly lonely. A stern woman in black invited me with a wordless motion of her bony hand into a room off the patio. Another servant lit a thick tallow candle on a heavy oak table, the woman pointed at an austere chair in whose gilt leather the small flame reflected itself, and I was left alone.

It was my first acquaintance with a Spanish palace, and its dark and splendid discomfort pressed down on me like a heavy hand. In Weimar we had lived among light furniture, made of the cherry wood from our own orchards, its simple lines dictated by the frugal state of our finances and Germany's poverty, white muslin curtains, flowerpots on the window sills, the friendly glow of modern oil lamps, and many, many books. Here everything was almost hostile in its solemnity. The chairs with their high, straight backs stood lined up along the wall like guests at a funeral. Too much display of silver candle sticks, braziers, enormous useless plates and bowls and chalices. And everywhere a profusion of tortured, twisting, writhing saints. San Sebastian, pierced by arrows and partly skinned, San Antonio, a bearded skeleton, seared and wasted by his own fervour. As I turned my eyes away from the terrifying picture they fell upon another sample of Spanish taste. On a small table, where in Weimar there would have been a flowered tea set of porcelain, or a rare edition of Horace, conceivably even an old Lutheran Bible, my glance encountered

the head of a man who appeared to have just been executed by the sword. It was a pale, beautiful, bearded head, drained of all blood, eyes broken, mouth open as if in a last scream, tongue lolling between the parched lips, and a streak of blood trickling down to the neck, which showed its bloody, stickily gleaming surface where it had been severed from the body.

As I had not fainted the day our ship was in danger of sinking, I did not faint then. I took, however, a few steps towards the tall window to catch air and breath. There was some swishing and giggling outside and I realized that I had been watched through the heavy iron grilles. I leaned my head against the wrought-iron bars, fighting down an impulse to vomit, and then I noticed the immobile figure of a tall woman, dressed all in black, who was standing near the cistern in the patio and staring at me with a hostility and contempt I had never before encountered in all my life. After we had stared at each other for a few moments the woman gathered up her skirt, called in a commanding voice something to the servants, and walked away. I realized that this must have been the lady of the house, Don Porfirio Bustamante's wife, and I began to understand. She was a good woman and I was not.

Defiantly I marched back to that terrible head and forced myself to examine it closer. It was my first collision with the gruesomely adept art in which the Spanish sculptors of the eighteenth century pictured the sufferings of their martyrs. I stood before this marvellously executed head of John the Baptist, touched its gory neck, and laughed hysterically about him and about myself. I was still laughing when Felipe came to fetch me.

With the cool politeness he reserved for our most public appearances, he bowed to me, said somewhat too loudly "May I have the honour of escorting you to your coach, Princess?" and offered me his sleeve to rest my hand upon. "His Excellency regrets immensely to be engrossed in most urgent work tonight, and wants me to assure you of his utmost devotion." With that he took me out of the room of the condemned, across the patio, past an invisible audience of mistress, retainers, and servants of the house, and out on to the street, where he lifted me into the waiting coach.

"Rejected by your hospitable friend, His Excellency?" I asked him.

"Don Porfirio's friendship and hospitality are beyond a

doubt," said Felipe "But the pox on the witch he is married to, the pox and the plague and the *vómito prieto* and the six hundred curses of Satan on her, and the pox on every ugly, bosomless, dried-up hag of her kind ! Domingo ! To the Casa Catalán !"

There was a drawn-out silence between us, and when Felipe tried to take my hand in his I pulled it away from him

"Now I must ask you something, Felipe, I never asked you before," I said tautly "Why don't you marry me ? It would make everything so much simpler—for both of us "

I had never seen him as appalled as he was then, there came some queer little sound from his corner of the coach, a gasp, almost a suppressed cry, as if he had been wounded "Marry thee ? I would give my life if I could marry thee ! But, my Caralinda, not only would it be a deadly sin, but also a crime Thou art married to another man—how may I marry thee ?"

Sometimes Felipe was so simple that he became too complicated for me "It would not be impossible to obtain a divorce, if that is what keeps you from making an honest woman of me," I suggested, and the unspoken insult I had received at Don Porfirio's house began to smart a little less

"The Church does not recognize divorce Besides, you can never get a divorce, for you are dead and buried Or did you forget that, Caralinda ?"

That's true, I thought, I'm dead and buried, and the one who goes on living in her strange muddled ways is not Clarinda Driesen but Felipe Contreras's mistress, whom no decent woman would receive in her clean, black, morbid Spanish palace

"Moreover," Felipe concluded brightly, "thou art much too exciting and I love thee too madly to have thee for my wedded wife "

The Casa Catalán stood on a small Plazuela at the outskirts of the town It was a friendly two-storied house, glued like a bird's nest to the town wall of Vera Cruz Over a door, painted in a happy rose colour and carved in elegant rococo lines, hung a gaily wrought lantern An equally elegant Madonna offered her round breast to a hungry little Infant Jesus in a niche beneath the balcony over whose railing a fringed Spanish shawl was draped The shutters were closed but dilapidated enough to show through wide cracks the lighted windows From inside came the drumming of an insistent

bass fiddle, plunk-plunk of a harp, then a burst of laughter, then a woman's deep voice in a plaintive song of love All this I observed while I was waiting in the coach after Felipe had entered the house as casually as if it were his own

"Whose home is this, Domingo?"

Domingo, as usual, gave no answer The coachman announced with grave solemnity "The Casa Catalán belongs to Doña Carmelita de Castro at your orders, Your Grace It is one of the great sights of Vera Cruz It is understood that Doña Carmelita only receives the richest and finest caballeros in her house, only Gachupines, not even Criollos, even if they had more money than there are silver bars stored in Perote"

He ended his grave announcement with an abrupt grin and said something under his breath to Domingo which brought a flicker of a smile even upon our servant's impenetrable face In not more than five minutes Felipe returned with springy steps and visibly restored to his usual status of optimism He was followed by Doña Carmelita, a laughing, friendly, round-faced woman who greeted me like an old friend and whom I liked at first sight She scanned me with a wise, amused, and knowing glance "But certainly, Don Felipe," she called out, "any child can see that the señorita doesn't have the fever It's nothing but the heat What worrying fools men are, aren't they, señorita?"

At once I began to feel much better A light breeze wafted from the sea into this part of the town, and a finely drawn, Turkish-looking moon glanced over the roofs

"Welcome, most welcome to my house, please enter, señorita, the Casa Catalán is yours That you may rest well within these walls"

"There is no finer bed in all of Vera Cruz than the one in which you are to sleep tonight," Felipe added "I understand Doña Carmelita had it especially imported from France"

"That is true It is a very special bed, said to have come from Madame Pompadour's estate That you may have sweet dreams in it, señorita——"

This was how my first night in Mexico ended I was lying in Madame Pompadour's gilded shell of a bed, in an airy, pink-walled room in the Casa Catalán There were no curtains at the windows, and Felipe had opened the wooden shutters to let the young breeze come in and bring a breath of wet, salty

freshness across the Gulf The bed was truly magnificent and I pushed back the thin coverlet to feel the air on my grateful skin My carmoisine brocade regalia lay in a crumpled heap on the shiny tiled floor, a dark puddle in the room dissolving in the translucence of a Southern night Felipe had taken out our candle and I heard him splash in the strangely luxurious dressing room next door where I had just taken a bath in a barrel filled with cool rain water The bed rose and fell, rose and fell with me, but not unpleasantly, it was more like the rhythm of a barcarole, a cradle song One by one my nerves relaxed I stretched happily, and as I did so I encountered what I took to be the painting of a nude woman on the ceiling A moment later I realized that this was I, myself, my own moving body in life size, and completely naked as I had never seen it before On the whole I was not displeased with the sight, although I would have wished my breasts to be a bit fuller, my shoulders, too, were still those of a young girl, not of the wanton woman I had become I was still stupidly wondering how my body had got up there upon the ceiling when Felipe entered into the picture, and every nerve in me began to tingle in an excitement without shame or restraint

"Did you see? There's a mirror on the ceiling—" I muttered, confused, amazed, uncomprehending

Felipe blew out the candle and in the luminous darkness I heard him softly laugh to himself "You aren't missing any contrivance, are you, Chiquitina dulcísima?" he said

In Mexico, I thought, in Mexico they hang their mirrors on the ceiling, smack over their beds It seems I'll have to learn many curious new things in Mexico

Love is like a mountain range, like the Sierras, like the Cordillera, love has its steep ascents, its perilous slopes and landslides, its dark ravines, its deep restful glens and forests Love has many peaks, aloft and shimmering in the clouds, but not inhabitable, not made to linger there longer than for a brief hour And like a mountain range, every love has one summit rising up and up, higher than any other Once that almost unattainable height has been reached, there remains nothing but the slow descent into the hills and plains of ordinary life

In our love we reached that summit the evening after we had come to the Peralta hacienda near Xalapa Later on I often

thought that we had reached it all too soon for a love that was to last a life long

The fever perils of Vera Cruz, the brooding furnace heat of the scrubby shore, the odour and squalor of the tropical coast were left behind us, so was the lighthearted twilight in which we had lived up to then, the swamplike insecurity, the dancing on thin ice, the mock and sham which Felipe chose to ignore but which had caused me much unspoken anxiety. Felipe had won the great gamble. A rich vein had been struck in his mine at a depth of twelve hundred and eighty feet. It was the richest strike and bonanza Guanaxuato had seen in fourteen years and it made Felipe from one day to the next all he had ever pretended and desired to be. Rich, respected, and powerful.

There was a strong opera bouffe flavour about the manner in which he learned of his great good luck. We were taking our morning chocolate and it had just begun to dawn on me in what sort of house I had spent my first Mexican night, when an eager, clamouring crowd assembled at the friendly if disreputable door of the Casa Catalán. Flunkeys with compliments and invitations from their masters—the first one of them by the same Don Porfirio Bustamante who had practically thrown us out of his palace the evening before, offers of high credit by clothes merchants and jewellers, flowers, baskets with fantastic fruit and poisonous-looking sweets. Litters and litter bearers were put grandly at my feet and disposal. Coachmen and touts were soliciting our patronage. Saddle horses were offered to Felipe's pleasure by the officers' staff of the royal garrison. A foppish hairdresser, a twittering French modiste, maids of every shape and colour, letters, greeting cards, assurances of devotion and friendship from the great names of the town, a milling, pushing, wrestling crowd of the small ones, the beggars, vendors, peddlers, and hucksters who hoped to coax a few coins from our abundance. And all of it climaxed by the amazing appearance of two smiling nuns—one apple-cheeked and happy, the other made of wrinkled parchment and shrewd calculation—two nuns calmly entering the house of sin to ask Felipe for a contribution towards the erection of a chapel for Santa Monica in their convent, now that the hand of God and the Saints had poured such riches out to him. Indeed, even these nuns in their holy seclusion had heard about Felipe's bonanza before the news of it had come to him directly.

By and by it penetrated that a special messenger, riding for weeks on end across rain-swept Mexico, had brought a letter to the Peralta office to be handed to Felipe on arrival. But this long-expected letter from Bert Quaile had been mislaid in the sad confusion following Don Alonso Peralta's death. Young Enrique Peralta had found it among his father's papers which he had taken to their hacienda, El Encanto, to study them there without disturbance. Another messenger had been sent to Vera Cruz, had been delayed by a landslide, and had roused one of the Peralta clerks at dawn. And thus the news of Felipe Contreras's bonanza had been discussed this very morning at the steps of the cathedral under the portales, in the market and in cantinas, as well as in officers' quarters and the palaces of the goldbraided nobility, before it at last caught up with us at the Casa Catalán.

Felipe had accepted it with a calm that showed me yet a new facet of his iridescent character "Why should I be surprised? What is there to lose my breath about? I knew it had to happen sooner or later. I am no fool, Caralinda, even if you think me one at times. When I bought that drowned mine for almost nothing I knew that all I had to do was drive a deeper shaft. Roberto did good work, but this is only the beginning. We have to go deeper yet, follow the Veta Madre down and down. The deepest shaft in the world, my lucky shaft—shall I name it the Santa Clara for you?"

Still worried lest I should yet attract the yellow fever, Felipe had lost no time in taking me to the safe high altitude of El Encanto, where we were received with all the flourish due to Felipe's new exalted status. All during the ponderous evening meal Don Enrique—a small-boned, somewhat priggish man with a tight little mouth under a generous moustache—had treated me with every conceivable honour, but immediately afterwards the two men had lit their cigarrillos and withdrawn into another room to discuss some weighty business matters. Felipe, my beloved gambler, my adventurer, the playful companion of my nights, now was a man of wealth and importance, and with the new fortune came grave responsibilities and decisions. I was left to myself, a bit lonely, a bit restless. For a little while I listened to the hacienda going to sleep, but there was too much of Helgenhausen in these evening sounds and smells and I did not want to think of Helgenhausen. Don Enrique had exercised some exceedingly

fine tact and courtesy by lodging me in his late wife's bedroom while placing Felipe in another part of the rambling estate It was a most polite way of demonstrating that I was received here, not as Felipe's dubious travel companion, but as the Princess Pontignac, a lady of flawless reputation and outstanding whiteness Quite definitely it was impossible for Felipe to visit me in this room, even if it were only for a moment to bid me good night But how I should be able to fall asleep without holding his hand in mine, I did not know

I undressed and gratefully cooled my eyelids, my hands and face, my neck, arms, and shoulders in a large basin of hammered copper In Germany I had not known what rapture it could be to splash and rinse and sluice insatiably, to waste water, cold, clear, sweet, blessed spring water, but I had learned my lesson Refreshed, I slipped into my white muslin negligee and stretched out on the late Señora Peralta's hard, austere, uncompromising bed I closed my eyes but was unable to relax, and the moment I closed my eyes a pinwheel began to revolve inside my eyelids A kaleidoscope of things seen on the way, a jumble of landscapes and people and trees and animals and faces, a riot of sights my eyes must have retained even though I had not consciously taken them in

Once more I was passing through white and yellow sun-beaten streets, along low houses, closed and shut tight against all life outside At noon they hardly throw any shadow, only a sharp finger-wide black line around the base Even the dust in which our small caravan of mules and muleteers jingles along is a stinging white glow at noon, each piece of silver and brass on bridle and harness a stabbing dagger of light Into the green, green steam bath of the tropical forest Orchids, flight of parrots, fountains of bamboo Down into the pit of a black ravine where masked, most polite brigands casually demand and are handed some money A rush of clouds, a stampede of bulky black, grey, purple shapes like wild bulls overhead, then a burst of rain, a crashing wall of glass Shelter under the overhanging palm fronds of a bamboo hut, inside a small fire fanned by a palm leaf in thin old hands and the smoke rising blue and bitter through the loosely woven roof A circle of naked little boys staring at me, sucking me—the blonde one—in through black, round, amazed eyes, nostrils and gaping mouths Skins of all colours bluish-black, heavy-lipped children of African slaves at the coast, coppery moon-

faced girls with Indian blood in their flushed, high cheeks Lean, greenish Indios with blade-thin noses, as though carved from the piedra verde of their rocks Chalk-white face of a nun, a Blanca, shepherding a flock of brown little girls The lighter pockmarked faces of our own muleteers, like hammered metal, glistening with sweat, already I am beginning to see the difference between Indio and Mestizo The first immobile, moulded into their serapes, standing, leaning, crouching before their miserable birdnest-like hovels The others lively, lighter of colour, broader of face and body, ornately dressed in leather and buttoned with silver, whistling, spitting, singing, swearing, joking, bragging Dreaming, praying at a wayside shrine, bent double under a load Now talking sweetly to their mules and burros as though they were girls, now yelling at a woman as though she were a mule

On that first trip from Vera Cruz to El Encanto I did not see the Mexicans sharply and clearly, I did not look at them as upon human beings from whom every last drop of dignity had been crushed, but only as if they were the picturesque staffage painted into a mural or embroidered into a tapestry I saw a man lead a crying dressed-up little girl towards a hacienda and did not think that she was to be delivered to rape and assault I saw a girl prostrate before a cross at the wayside and I did not know that her brother had been lashed to death at the very church door And when an old man, erect and withered as a tree, raised his fists and called after us some curse in his barbaric Indian dialect, I did not understand it and I laughed

That evening in El Encanto all I had seen during the day was only a mad jumble in my brain I opened my eyes and gazed at the white triangle of moonlight sharply drawn upon the tiles of the floor I had not been sleeping, the train of pictures had ended and left nothing but a deep quiet, made deeper yet by the sound of a million crickets, like a moon bow playing on a thin silver string in the sharp, black-and-white night outside I stepped out on to the gallery before my door and looked up into the sky The hacienda was asleep, a dark huddle touched with silver wherever the moonlight hit a smooth surface, a tiled roof, a circle of water in the stone bowl of a fountain, a glazed jar, a polished saddle hanging over a fence

The brightness of the moon had soaked up every other light, and beyond it there was only Space, the cold, black, deep, clear Space in which the universe of the unbelievers hung

suspended in its unsolved, insoluble mystery The thought of millions of planets revolving around millions of suns, of worlds behind all known worlds, made me feel as if I were vanishing, sucked up in that endless, merciless sky, the moon pulled me out of myself I put my hand on the cool, moist rail of the stairs and went down, without a sound and almost without any weight

I crossed a patio, dived into the darkness of an arched gate, came into a second patio The buildings seemed asleep, the windows dark, grilled, barred, shut, and shuttered Now there came a fragrance towards me, incomparably mixed of sweet-ness and bitterness, a scent entirely new to me and yet as well known as if I had waited for it all my life I followed this fragrance as if it were a call My eyes were getting used to the moon I passed through a small wicket and was now in the heart of that fragrance, in a grove of orange trees in bloom They were round dark cupolas, their lowest branches almost touching the ground I could see the shining foliage, the waxy blossoms, small green buds, and ripe pale oranges in the small flicker of a thousand glow-worms

And then I saw Felipe

He had stepped out of a door and stood under a lantern which shed a trickle of yellow light over his figure He wore no coat, only his modishly tight white pants and the ruffled batiste shirt, open at the neck He stood there, breathing deeply, alone with himself, not knowing that I could see him There was about him that aloneness, that pride, that masculine beauty and purposeful strength of a stag stepping out into a clearing and standing there in the midst of dawn with the steep arch of his neck and the muscle-play of shoulders and haunches and the eyes under long eyelashes gentle and im-pelling as those of a child And as at the sight of such an animal, so rarely caught unawares, my heart was gripped in a sweet, smarting tightness on seeing my lover as he was when he believed himself alone

He was completely relaxed, but even alone with himself he was *muy hombre*, as the Spaniards say There was less arrog-ance and more of that ever-present, unconscious animal melancholy in his eyes The flicker and dash were gone, much of the brilliancy, the alert irony, the playful attitude, the urge to make a joke of his feelings, to persiflante his own gallantry This was my man, my lover, unarmed, unmasked, without the

mailed shirt all lovers wear—because all lovers are afraid of getting hurt As he stood there under the lantern it came over me with a crushing force that this man, this unfathomable creature, this eternal stranger, was all I ever wanted, all I should ever want in all my days, that in him I had found a fulfilment as is given to very few

I had not moved, but he lifted his head and then he walked towards me, straight and without hesitation towards the tree in whose shadow I was hiding The glow-worms blew out their lights as he was approaching and then began to glimmer again as he stood before me The fragrance of the orange blossoms hung around us like a tent He looked down into my face and I expected him to say something or to smile, but he remained silent, only looking at me with an utmost seriousness and intensity I could feel the warmth of his body and hear his breath come and go in the deep silence that enveloped us Without a word he began to walk, and I walked with him as if mesmerized, both of us moving, pulsating in the same rhythm Slowly love, tenderness, desire, excitement began to rise and mount in us, the night held its breath, a ripe orange dropped softly to the ground, we walked side by side through the small moon islands between the trees, we crossed the grove, left it behind, we trod on the moon-soaked, cropped grass of a pasture, and suddenly a million crickets grew silent Still that slow mounting and rising, as of a flood, as of distant drums calling alarm in our blood The roofs and walls of the hacienda fell away below us and we gained the crest of the hill We had not spoken, we had not kissed, we had not even touched each other's hand, and yet we were integrated in each other as never before

We stood still, Felipe raised his hand and pointed into the night There, in the deep blue space beyond the moon, appeared a single star, larger than any star ever was A floating, shimmering cone, a crystal, a cloud of diamonds, and yet no cloud, no crystal, could hold such unearthly beauty

"Orizaba," Felipe said softly

It stood in the night for a moment, the Mountain of the Stars, mountain dreamed up by the mysterious gods of the mysterious country, stood there for me to see, a vision, a mirage, a shining miracle, a promise, and then it dissolved into a white glow as of another milky way, became a thin, luminous mist, and was gone

It was as if Felipe had made me a gift of this minute, and now he was walking on, over the crest of the hill and towards the dark outline of a clump of tall trees. The crickets were loud again after the breathless silence, the moon less bright, and the voice of a waterfall sang somewhere in a black ravine. Now love had become unbearable, the distant drums were close and everywhere, pounding in my chest, in my temples, in my veins, in the centre of my being a woman. If now, now, now I could not be with Felipe I would die in the crush of love. As though we were made of one piece, we walked faster and faster, Felipe's breath came loud and hard. Across the last stretch of light that was between us and the darkness under those trees, we were running as though fleeing from a dam break, as if swept ahead by the rising flood within us, and the moment we had reached the cave of shadows we fell into each other's arms and together to the ground.

We stayed down there, in a oneness as never before and never after. It was a giving up, a going out of oneself, so complete as I sometimes think it will be when this life ends and the next begins. We were dying down there, dying up and up into the night, into the sky, up into the universe, into the revolving space without end. Slowly we returned, still together but two again, man and woman, still alive, still within the limits of this earth. My hand was resting on Felipe's heart, which was still racing and then slowly ebbed down and stilled itself.

"Thou—only one—" he said. It was the first word spoken between us. "Now we were up on the top of Orizaba."

The ground where we were lying was dripping with the heavy dew of these high regions, my thin white gown was soaked through with it. My slippers were full of tiny pebbles and my legs were scratched. Also, I noticed that the lovely smell of damp earth was mixed with the distinct odour of fresh cow dung. In general I did not mind cow dung, although I hoped that we had not lain directly in it. And I did not want to be reminded of Helgenhausen just then. "How far have we to go from the top of Orizaba to the hacienda?" I asked, trying to come back to earth with a little joke.

"Are you tired? Shall I carry you?"

"Aren't you tired?"

I heard him laugh to himself. "It takes more than loving

you to make me tired," he said, gliding into a relaxed tenderness and, mocking himself and me, he became impertinent again. He got up, brushed some grass from his trousers, shook his hair back, and arranged his crumpled shirt in a becoming manner. He snuffed the cow dung, snorted, and remarked happily "Madame de Pompadour assuredly did never sleep here." He picked me up, said, "Véte, mujer," like a peon, and "Arree!" like a muleteer, and, lifting me in his arms as if I had no weight at all, he carried me back the enchanted way we had come.

"Good night, my love," he said as he put me down in the shelter of the orange grove. "This is where I must leave you. And, listen. Of this night I shall think in the hour of my dying. Amen."

When I woke up in the morning Felipe had gone back to Vera Cruz with Don Enrique to attend to all the important transactions necessary for the owner of one of the richest mines of Guanaxuato. In a tin cage in the gallery before my door hung a frightened young green parrot, fresh from the forests, who beat his clipped wings and tried to remember what Felipe had taught him to tell me *Te quiero, Caralinda Siempre Siempre*.

The trouble with my memory is that it acts like a poorly trained dog. I whistle for it and it doesn't come. I throw a stick for it to retrieve and it brings back a stone, or, worse yet, it puts a dead young bird down at my feet, wings broken, a drop of blood trickling from the beak. And like a poorly trained dog my memory seems to be proud yet of this achievement. It does not obey my call and is out of reach when I want it for company. And then again, when I wish to be left alone and in peace, I can't get rid of it. Go away, I say, can't you see I have no use for you just now? But it looks at me with reproachful eyes, it wags its tail and climbs into my lap and licks my face. You can't command memory and you can't rely on it.

For to remember is to lie.

Just now I want to remember Guanaxuato as it was when I arrived there. But all I can think of is something very small and completely unrelated to the rest. I was riding with Felipe in the hills and on the trail I perceived a patch of flowers the like of which I had never seen before. But when I reined in my

horse and bent down I discovered that these were no flowers at all, it was a solid mass of butterflies, in all shades from white to lemon to orange In the centre of the tight circle one dead butterfly was lying with folded wings, and all the others were sadly sitting around the tiny corpse, just sitting there, vibrating ever so slightly and fanning their dead little brother with their own fine living wings "A wake of butterflies," Felipe said, and we rode on

And then, without transition, I remember the evening when Bert Quaile was killed in La Rosaura's ravaged, pillaged house He was lying there, dead and broken, on the bare floor, and La Rosaura's girls sadly sat around his twisted body, they did not cry, they only trembled, and with their small eloquent hands and their little fans they chased the flies away

I want to remember Guanajuato as it was when I arrived there, but all I can see in my mind is the town as I saw it last, ten years later, with streets like the bloody bowels of a horse gored at the bull-fight, with blue-faced corpses swinging from the gallows on the Plaza Mayor, with the hot powder smell of the final fusillade still in the air, when the outrage of the insurrection had been retaliated by the outrage against the insurgents For such was the character and climate of Guanajuato a town as wild as Weimar is tame, as unforgiving as we here are conciliatory, as easily driven into a stampede as Weimar is safely embedded in the niceties of life

When I left Guanajuato it was a town of beggars, its riches destroyed, its palaces burned and sacked, its silver mines wrecked, its aristocrats stoned and slaughtered But when I arrived there, late in 1801, it was at its height, the richest, the proudest, the wildest, the craziest community, a town of millionaires It had grown too large for the narrow arroyo into which a whim of the early miners had crammed it as into a bag It was stretching out and groping with sixty bridges across the streams that encircled it, it tentacled up the steep slopes of the hills, and with the boxlike adobe huts of the poor districts it clung to the precipitous mountain-sides In these always-crumbling huts, climbing over each other between the festering metallic-green masses of cactus and nopal, lived the teeming crowds of miners Beyond rose the ring of hill and mountain, cerro and rock and Bufo, in whose countless shafts and galleries and tunnels and raises the precious metal was worked, day and night, in the never-ending drive for new riches It was said

that every foot of earth, every mountain shoulder consisted of silver. The street on which you walked, you broke to build a house on, the very hole you cistern might lead you to a silver vein, the dust the wind stirred up, the bottom of every stream, the clay scooped up to make adobe from was rich with silver. This town stood on silver, it lived on silver, killed for silver, it spoke, dreamed, desired, knew nothing else but silver.

In the crowded core of this town, in the palaces around the Plaza Mayor, dwelt the raw new aristocracy of the Colonies, all these condes and marqueses who had been ruthless Spanish adventurers, stubborn gamblers, miners with strong backs and a will of steel, until the recent hour when they had struck the one lucky vein. Locked away from the world by their all but inaccessible silver mountains, they wished for nothing better than to outdo each other in a showy display of their young wealth in spectacular gifts to their King (and a more miserable travesty of a king than Carlos IV can hardly be imagined), in bribes, called presents, to his vain and venal virreys and officials, in lavish contributions to the Holy Church. They endowed monasteries, and on top of their mines they erected more and more churches that were almost bursting with the exuberance of their gilded incrustations and the crackling fireworks of their altars and reliquaries.

In Guanaxuato, I often thought, there were no houses as we had them at home. There were either palaces or hovels. There was either fantastic wealth or deepest poverty. Everything was extreme, in Guanaxuato, and there was no middle of the road in this throbbing, hammering, blasting, madly living town. There was the unbearable pride of the Europe-born aristocracy and the cowering submission of the Mexicans from whom the Spanish rule had crushed everything but slavish obedience. But this I did not understand at first, and it took years of living and much of Bert Quaile's teachings before my eyes opened to it. There was either saturation or hunger. There was either love or hatred, both deadly. There was either drought or flood, either of them killing hundreds and thousands of people. Even the weather was extreme in that small wrinkle of ground between the brows of the mountains. There were either days of an Elysian serenity or tempests and hurricanes which left a trail of ruins behind. There was no moderation, only a merciless extreme. There was everywhere and at all times something

which made you shake your head and think Crazy! Crazy people! Crazy, crazy town!

In this crazy town I lived in a small, boastfully luxurious palace of pink stone whose tall windows and finely wrought balcony looked out upon the Plazuela de San Diego. There the Princess Pontignac lived her mad, strong, troubled and idle life of a kept woman, while Clarinda Driesen was resting peacefully under a willow tree in Helgenhausen. In those first years Felipe gave me everything he had promised, and more. More gowns and robes than I could ever wear, enough jewellery to deck out a heathen idol. An army of amazingly inefficient servants, singing and quibbling in the rear of the house, giggling and crying, stealing much and working little, and making me often homesick for my Babette or for our old Schindler's honest clumsiness. In the stable two fine saddle horses—which Felipe did not want me to ride except in his company. A coach with a team of silky silver-grey mules, although a coach was the last thing one could use in this town of steps and stairs and steep inclines. I had a reception room fit for an embassy but hardly any visitors. My bedroom had a silver threshold fashioned from the first silver harvest of La Ramita, and when Felipe carried me across it the first time and put me down amidst the barbaric splendour of my chamber I felt like laughing and crying.

"You see, I did keep my promise. How do you like it, Caralinda?"

"Why—it's much too precious for me," I said, appalled.

There were silver candleholders and silver-framed mirrors, a profusion of silver on the dressing table, in fact, there was even a silver pot de chambre. In the midst of it all stood an enormous bed with hangings of red Chinese silk. On its head and foot-board some biblical scenes were painted which I remember well, and sometimes, when I awaken in my chaste room in Helgenhausen, I wonder hazily why they are not there to catch my eyes first thing in the morning.

"How do you like your bed, my love? I designed it myself," Felipe said, bouncing with pride.

The paintings were a sly, gaily wicked collection of all the iniquity to be found in the Bible. There was Adam, handsome and masculine and almost a portrait of Felipe, Adam, visibly and unmistakably aroused by a seductive naked little Eva holding an apple to her round apple-shaped breast, while the

snake anticipated with a grin the next step of these not quite so innocent lovers in Paradise There were the temptations of St Anthony, depicted as tempting as possible, there was Bathsheba, slim and white of body, taking a bath, and King David watching her from across the walls of his house And there was the daughter of Herodias, caught in an outright lascivious pose as she was dancing before a leering Herod It was an amusing and hospitable bed to make love in, although it sometimes seemed to raise an ironical eyebrow and to point out that people in love were fools, had been fools through ages, and could not be taken seriously Also, it was a very large bed, and when I had to sleep in it all by myself it seemed curiously empty and lonely

Insomnia had never been one of my complaints, but during my second year in Guanaxuato I learned something about the almost shameful torments known only to the secret brotherhood of those who can't find sleep During the day I had more time to fritter away than I knew what to do with, because during the day Felipe was working, and working hard, in La Ramita Certainly the condes and marqueses of Guanaxuato were not an idle crowd, many of them had passed through a hard school in which they had learned how to wield hand drill and hammer themselves, how to plan a shaft, a tunnel, a drift, a raise, how to get the greatest profit out of their property, and, most of all, how to keep their hundreds and thousands of miners under discipline During the day Felipe was in his mine, and all I could do was wait for the evening when he would come to me It made me feel almost like an actress whose days pass in a dim void because her whole life is compressed and saved up for the brilliant performance of the night But not too seldom the performance was cancelled, Domingo would arrive with a funny, tender little note, some flowers, some triste little joke announcing that Felipe had to remain overnight in La Ramita for one reason or another

During the second year, when Felipe forgot ever so often to send me a message if he could not see me, this large wicked bed of mine offered all the comfort and rest that sleeping in an anthill would have given me The hour-glass sands of the night ran, slow and hot and gritty, through my brain, time crept by with its freight of alien and yet all too familiar sounds The choking shrieks beyond the Plazuela did not come from a murdered man but from a braying ass The tumult under my

balcony was not the outbreak of a revolution but a fond drunk farewell between friends Crash and explosion at midnight meant not the opening shots of a war but only the mortars and firecrackers with which to honour one of the town's countless saints Long before daybreak a music band was posted under my windows and a raw baritone snatched me out of my precious first cloud of sleep This, I assumed, was Andreas Ruiz, a rich young miner of Felipe's acquaintance I dug my fists into my ears and resisted a vulgar urge to drop my silver pot de chambre on the serenader's head

In the beginning there had been quite a crush of gentlemen visitors, handsome dashing creatures, most of them, and not one who had not tried to seduce me The one to make the boldest attempts was Andreas Ruiz, which probably meant that he was Felipe's closest friend Andreas was good-looking in a rough-hewn Caesarean way, as if a sculptor had begun making his bust and lost interest in the midst of it Even after the initial flush and flurry had subsided he kept on smuggling secret billets-doux, assuring me of his love through the window grilles, making his horse prance under my balcony, pursuing me with hints and glances, with handsome promises and his absurd serenading all of it part of the passionate though formalized wooing which Spanish humour calls "eating the iron" Instead of feeling hurt in his ticklish honour, Felipe only laughed about it all Perhaps he would have felt disappointed if his friends had not shown their admiration for me by trying to make him a cuckold There was always the same conflict for Felipe He wanted to display me to the entire town as his mistress and possession the Princess Pontignac, who belonged, body and soul, to Felipe Contreras, at the same time he wanted me to be received and respected as the true lady he knew me to be But I found no friends among the ladies of the ruling families They were arrogant, condescending, and envious in turn, and I had no wish to curry favour with them They were narrow-minded, ignorant, and superficial, with their gossip and their little intrigues, their cigarrillos and their abysmal laziness, they might well have lived behind the walls of a harem As for those other women, whose reputation was not better than mine, they belonged to a class of camp followers with whom I had nothing in common

Andreas Ruiz took his relentless course through five verses of his song and I closed my eyes, covered my head with the pillow,

and tried not to wonder where Felipe had spent the night Three o'clock I knew the sound of every church clock striking off the time, the creaking of a loose board in the nightly gusts of wind The ever-same three dogs who would soon have their fight on the bridge near the house The young rooster who got up before the others to practise crowing The young bugler behind the barracks who did the same The tiptap and clink-clank of an early string of mules and burros driven across the Plazuela The furious gobble of two enraged turkeys in the kitchen yard of San Diego Monastery I slid into a thin sleep, woke up, fell asleep, woke up Five o'clock Trumpets, drums, and march of soldiers Daybreak, and the bells were calling to morning Mass, some slow and deep and serious, some tinny and quick and nasal like the voices of market women First one after the other, then the whole chorus of them, the Parroquial, the Church of the Compañía, San Diego, San Francisco, and, more distant, Carmen, Merced, Belén Fading out one by one, and then a minute of deep quiet A tortured roar and vile smell from the nearby slaughterhouse Quiet again Desperately I closed my eyes and fell asleep at last A long-drawn cry as from the condemned in hell awakened me "Carbón, carboooooon!"

I rubbed my tired eyes, my heart was pounding The cries rose, passed under the window in all their strident urgency, the morning cries of Mexico

"Leche, lecheee! Frutas, frutas de Santa Rosa, com-pren mis frutas! Pollos, guajalotes, huevos! Agua, agua de la primera, Aguaaaaa! Helotes, heloteeee! Carbooooooooon!"

I gave up and pulled the rope of my silver bell After a long while Consuelo would appear with my chocolate and Doña Dolores would crawl in like a black spider and squirt a bit of poison over my morning

"Did the princess have a pleasant night?"

"Passably so, thanks"

"I hope the princess was not disturbed because Don Felipe neglected to pay a call last evening?"

I gave no answer "Open the shutters, Consuelo," I said "I want some fresh air"

Like every lady in town, I had to have a dueña Doña Dolores de Uvalde was a yellow-skinned, moustachioed, vitriolic nuisance Not just a widow, but a black, bleak

widowed widow, the essence of unpalatable widowhood. There was a permanent feud on between her and my sloppy, sullen personal maid, Consuelo "That creature without reason, that beast, that dirty Indio," the widow would warn me "She will steal the white out of your eye if you don't watch her. You must beat her regularly or she will think you a fool."

"That one, that Dolores," Consuelo would tell me in turn "Always bragging about her family! As if not the whole town knew for sure that her mother was nothing but a coast mulatto White, that widow? I swear, when she washes off the flour from her face it is darker than my own brown butt!"

The shutters were pushed open and the widow gave a demonstrative shudder and wrapped her shawl tighter. My craving for fresh air, my joy in being outdoors were a constant source of fear and irritation for my household, and the battle for and against ventilation was fought with great intensity on both sides. But then, nature worship and Rousseau were unknown quantities in Guanajuato. Consuelo knelt down, put slippers on my feet, and let go of a jet of gossip which excited Loro so, that he bit into the bars of his silver cage and screeched rude counterpoints into Consuelo's report.

"Chepito says that young Rafael Villanueva and his father had another row over that girl—the Cubana they call her—and a worse one has never come from the Capital into this town—but, naturally, where there is money there are putas, and riches make lechers, says Chepito. Oh yes, and Don Andreas Ruiz lost four hundred and twenty reals at the cock-fights, and Chepito won six, but then Chepito knows more about fighting-cocks——"

Chepito was our daily gazette. With two tall slim earthenware jugs fastened to his back and front by the leather straps around his forehead, he carried water and news from the public fountains to the houses, there was never any lack of news although there was often a grave scarcity of water, and at such times the town became still somewhat dirtier than usual and people got drunk on pulque, mezcal, wine, or aguardiente, for sheer lack of water. Chepito was an insolent, tousle-haired, fickle Don Juan Tenorio of the back lanes, and in our kitchen occurred loud and passionate scenes of jealousy between my broad-beamed cook Lupe and Consuelo, who claimed a monopoly on his favours, but nobody dared to

attract my maid's displeasure, for her mother was a curandera and might easily hex some curse and disease on her daughter's enemies

"You and your Chepito!" The widow was bravely cutting off my maid's morning report "No more of your unsavoury gossip Take this linen up on the roof to be laundered I myself shall serve Her Grace's breakfast"

"That stupid animal might disturb the princess with some tactless tattle," the black menace said as soon as Consuelo had sulkily withdrawn "Indeed, I was afraid she might blurt out where Don Felipe appears to spend his evenings when he does not come here to pay his call"

"Never mind that, Doña Dolores I know where he spends his evenings"

"Well, it is no flour out of my sack," the widow said angrily "But you know how devoted I am to you and—"

I knew all about the widow's devotion She hated me because I was young and had a man whereas she was dried up and alone She had nothing but contempt for me, for she was an honest woman and I was not On the other hand, she dreaded the day this cosy nest would have to be abandoned The good pay, the presents, bribes, and tips, the money and trinkets, silks and linens she stole from me, all the good life depended on my ability to hold rich Don Felipe's interest Thus she detested me for having a lover, while at the same time she was forever giving me advice, sneaking me love potions, and praying to the Virgen not to let my powers of seduction go into a decline

"I could tell you where Don Felipe was last night, but I won't," she informed the back I had turned to her

"Well, don't then," I said

"However, if I were the princess, I would ask him why he did not come and then see what he has to answer"

I stirred my chocolate and drank it "Of course men never tell the truth," remarked the widow

"Would you mind looking after the servants now? I want to pray," I said It was my only means of getting her out of my room I put down my cup and went to the prie-dieu in the corner The widow walked reluctantly as far as the door and there she came to a halt "Well, I hate to tell this, but it is better if Your Grace learns it from me than from other persons," she said, with her long, pointed feet planted firmly

on my silver threshold "Don Felipe was seen last night at La Rosaura's" And happy to have got her sting into me, she left me at last to my thoughts

The first time I had heard of La Rosaura's had been in Vera Cruz, where Carmelita had spoken of her with respect and high esteem In Guanajuato, too, La Rosaura's house was mentioned with a queer variety of civic pride This was a rich town full of strong, virile rich men, considerably more men than women, and Satan be damned if we couldn't have a brothel every inch as good or even better than the best in the Capital ! The clergy tolerated La Rosaura's place with the broadminded understanding for human frailties which gives the Catholic Church such strength of survival The young men discussed it with a dash and a grin and a whisper, the young girls broke out in a rash of curiosity when they could make their maids tell of the secrets of La Rosaura's The magistrate and the Spanish government alike extracted high taxes and bribes but otherwise were on friendly terms with La Rosaura, to the married men it was a friendly haven and to the married women a poisoned well Once, when we were riding in the hills, Felipe had pointed out the house to me, it stood on a strategic point, near the entrance of the town and above the road towards the mines, on the slope of the Cerro del Cuarto where the construction of the huge new granary had got under way A friendly-looking house from whose blue-pillared terrace red geraniums spilled in a thick cascade

"There, that's La Rosaura's," Felipe had said in his offhand way "The trap of Satan The abode of carnal sin"

"It looks clean, though"

"Yes It has shade," Felipe had remarked, which is the Spanish way of saying that a home has a pleasant atmosphere

"You have been there, then?"

"Before I knew you? What do you think?"

"Often?"

"It should be fairly obvious by now that I am neither a saint nor a eunuch," Felipe had said in great merriment, and with that I had forgotten all about La Rosaura's But now, it seemed, there was a bitter necessity to think of it again

I knelt down on my prayer bench, put my head on my arms, and wanted to think, but instead I began to pray I believe that was the first time that I had a talk with the Virgen, whose picture hung over the prie-dieu Up to that morning it had

been there only as a decoration and for appearance's sake, another bit of sham and deception, like my title. Now, a little cold, a little frightened, and very lonely, I talked to the Madonna. Please, I said, please, don't let it be true. I have nothing but Felipe and I love him so. Please, oh, please, let nothing come between us.

I went before the mirror and examined myself, I was still young, wasn't I? I was as blonde as ever, although the muddy water of Guanajuato had taken some of the lustre off my hair. I was still smooth and white, because after each prickling attack of the sunburn my skin peeled and a new layer came into use. Or was I not quite as white as I had been? Were there more freckles? And what about my breasts? Not only had they remained small, but I had thinned down altogether. Suddenly I was seized by a wild, smarting attack of savage jealousy. I had a vision of the sort of girl Felipe might visit at La Rosaura's. Dark, small, with thick brows and lashes, with broad white teeth, with the large full bosom of a fertile goddess and the inviting, rippling rump of a trained whore. I turned my back to the mirror and set my teeth. If there was such a girl I would have to fight her with her own means.

I oiled my body and rubbed it with perfume. I played with my jewellery and tried on one dress after the other. I called for Consuelo, had her brush my hair, and for almost an hour we experimented with different ways of coiling it up. Then, disgusted with myself, I gave up all efforts and went into my patio.

The patio was my favourite part of the palace, much more my own than the overloaded rest of it, in the patio there was some air, there was a triangular pattern of sun and shade, moreover, the patio was the only place where I could make myself believe that a few duties were left to me. Otherwise my household kept me empty-handed, for ladies in the Colonies were not supposed to do anything at all. Domingo ruled in the stable, Lupe and her slaveys in the kitchen, the widow kept me away from chests and coffers and storerooms. A staff of girls was for ever laundering and bleaching and starching and goffering and ironing our linen on the flat roof, which is the acknowledged centre for all the gossip and laughter of Mexican housemaids. I would love to have visited the market, which was a richer and gayer spectacle than any I had seen in our theatre in Weimar, but a lady of my station going

to market would have caused a scandal, even Lupe would never lower herself to carrying a basket All over town tasks were not done by individuals but by processions Lupe followed by a kitchen maid, who was followed by a smaller and younger kitchen maid, who in turn was waited on by a little boy or two With the result that the basket was always handed on to the smallest, youngest, weakest, and most defenceless little urchin, who would at last stagger into our kitchen under his cargo of onions, beans, and chile

Whenever I think of Mexico I have before my eyes small exhausted people carrying frighteningly huge and heavy loads, it is a remnant of the times before the Spanish conquerors introduced horses and mules, when man was the only beast of burden known in Mexico Labor de sangre, they called it appropriately The work of the blood Even in my own lovely patio I had to endure the painful sight of strings of little men carrying us new flagstones from the distant quarries Bent and doubled under their loads, they came trotting in, the leather sacks with rocks or some particularly large single flagstone tied to their head straps, sweat was running from their limbs and no breath was left in them As soon as they broke the rhythm of their trotting and dropped their load, they fell to the ground and there they would lie for an hour as if dead, and then trot back to the quarry for more

"Wouldn't it be better to have our new flagstones brought by mules ?" I had once asked Felipe, because my own chest was aching just from watching the cargadores fight for breath

"No Indios are cheaper," Felipe had answered

But by now the flagstones were laid, the patio was quiet, and I went to work I cleaned all the bird cages, I watered all the potted plants, I fed bananas to my two honeybears, wondering how much Goethe had known about these mischievous little mountebanks to call us children honeybears I called for Tío Lalo, our man of all work, and told him to put Loro's perch into the shade I spent much time picking yellow leaves from a purple-blossomed curtain of an intriguing, exotic vine whose name nobody could tell me Tío Lalo brought a ladder and tied some of the thorny runners to the upper arcades, and I was glad of his company Of all the servants, I liked Tío Lalo best He was a slightly limping old man with a dark furrowed face and white hair, and his bright eyes and mobile mouth reminded me somewhat of a certain Herr Planke who used to

play the *pères nobles* on the Weimar stage Tío Lalo had been a miner in his youth but had wisely quit the dangerous work before it killed him, and whatever I learned about mining I learned from him

"If a barenador does not give up while he is young, he won't see the day when he is thirty-five," said Tío Lalo "As for myself, thanks to the Virgen of Guadalupe who constantly protected me, I only lost these two fingers of my left hand, and once I was caught in a blast of my own powder and when I came to it had thrown me half a league and I was as naked as a newly born, so help me God The explosion had stripped me clear of all my clothes and given them away to the poor My leg was broken in three pieces, I picked them up and straightened them out and tied them to my own hand drill and I offered a little wax leg to Our Señor de Villaseca, and by His miracle I was perfectly healed except for this bit of a limp But the next time when I was hit on the head by a rock twice as large as the Bufo I said to myself, 'Lalo, mi hijo,' I said, 'you had your three warnings and you know that the next time you will not get out alive' And so I dropped my pride into the pit and left the mine And, I assure Your Grace, a miner's pride is harder than iron, and it is easier for the King of Spain to give up his throne than for a miner to give up working in his mine "

He was a wise, lovable old braggart and I settled myself in the patio to fill another empty hour with his patter "Have you a family, Tío Lalo ? Sons ? Children ?"

"God gave me twelve and God took nine," he said, crossing himself "Ah, Your Grace, what a man I was ! Not many miners can make as many children as I did Mining is man's work and the mine sucks a man's strength worse than a sick whore I have noticed how many miners die without any progeny and I have thought much about it Mining is hard work, perhaps a little harder work than God planned for men to do, not enough food, not enough sleep, and then the heat down there ! Your Grace, it is so hot in the pit that I sometimes thought Lalo, my son, if your blast goes just one inch deeper the bottom of the pit will drop out and you will fall directly into hell, I swear that's how hot it feels down there As if a man were boiling in a cauldron, with nothing between the fires of hell and the pit but a few handfuls of rock Then you come up, all in a sweat, and it is so cold up there that your own

sweat freezes to ice and you cough and cough as though you wanted to spit out your own lungs What do you do then? You go to the next cantina and drink until you get warm again You thank the Virgen that another day has passed with you still alive, and you are happy and you are with friends and you drink and you want music and you drink some more, you don't want to eat, but you must drink to replace all the liquid you were sweating out in the pit Then your friends carry you home and throw you on your mat and your wife screams at you and you kiss her and you try to lie with her and it does not work because you left too much of the stuff in the pit and you are sorry for yourself and you cry or you beat your wife for anger that she can't make you feel like a man And the next morning you buy flowers to bring to the Virgen or to Our Señor Jesucristo, you pray that you may not die that day either and you go down again That's how it is with most miners, but not with me, Your Grace! Twelve children God gave me, and three warnings, and here I am, still alive"

He plucked a few yellow leaves from a shrub with wonderfully fragrant white flowers—the flowers of San Juan, they were called—and added thoughtfully "There is a mark on men who work in the mines, you get the eye for it and you can see it if a man is marked to die young It is an occupation with much death in it, Your Grace, and while they never talk about it, they know it and it is in them all the time That gives them their pride and it marks them There is this—something like hunger I have not much time I won't live long Maybe I won't live another day But today I am alive I want everything I can get—today It is true, miners are well paid, but there is that hunger in them, as deep as the deepest shaft All the millions of the Conde de Valenciana wouldn't be enough to fill that hunger It is so, Your Grace, and I don't know why Maybe what the men are hungry for they can't get for money Drink, music, gamble, women, more drink, a fiesta, a fight, what else? I'm hungry, the miner says I'm still hungry and tomorrow I might be dead"

He took two bananas and carried them to the honeybears and laughed as they groped for them and held on to his legs like little children They were fastened with thin, long chains to the crossbar of the cistern and had enough leeway to do all sorts of mischief

"I would like to go down into the mine again, though,"

Tío Lalo said "I would like to blast an opening and be the first one to go in there You go in and in and then you stand still and you listen First you hear your own breath and your own heart, bong, bong, bong And then you can hear a murmur in the rock That's the silver that speaks The silver speaks, Your Grace The silver knows that you are the master and it speaks to you You know what we miners say Gold is the male and silver is the female That's why Don Felipe found the Veta Madre He is much man, es muy hombre, Don Felipe is, and the silver loves him "

I liked to listen to Tío Lalo, but after a while he hobbled away to take a nap and a sip of pulque behind the kitchen The bells began to peal, it was three o'clock Sometimes the minutes in this country seemed slower than anywhere else, long, slow, indolent Indian minutes

One of the things for which I was sometimes homesick was the jangling of a doorbell There were no doorbells in Guanajuato Visitors announced themselves by the clatter of hoofs outside, then the horses were hitched to the heavy iron rings at the side of the bulky door, and the servant, without whom no self-respecting person might be seen on the street, would pound with loud, hard fists on the nail-studded panels and hoarsely ask admission for his master I had never been bored in my life, but now, with too much time on my hands, I used to wait for such announcement that would break the cloistered monotony of my days

But Don Lorenzo de Lara, who came shortly after four o'clock to give me my Spanish lesson, owned neither horse nor servant He was a dear elderly gentleman who taught Spanish literature to the untamed crowd of young students at the Colegio He had soft, resigned, and sceptical eyes, soft hands which were always a little soiled from handling old books and manuscripts, he had soft, thin, unkempt hair and a soft voice, and he was a fiery, fierce, burning fanatic about anything pertaining to the language of Castile I had chosen him as my teacher because, next to the colour of one's skin, the cadence of one's speech was the most important mark of nobility in these locked-up, narrow-minded, isolated Colonies

"You really want to see him again, this Señor Lara ?" The widow Uvalde asked me with pursed lips as she announced my visitor "This so-called professor, he should be ashamed of himself and his filthy old coat—" It was true, my friend De

Lara was not an example of cleanliness He possessed only one suit of clothes and one shirt, a most fatigued shirt whose greyish, frayed pleats he tried to hide by arranging an equally unclean black neckcloth in a vaguely romantic and Byronic manner over it "He is poor, Doña Dolores, I don't think the Colegio pays its teachers well"

"Yes, and the whole town knows where the money goes and on whom he spends every peso he earns, the old maricón," said the implacable widow

I knew it, too, and I could not help feeling sorry for the old man He was in love, deadly, fatally, ridiculously With a love that was bondage and slavery and inferno he was tied to a certain Romero Hernandez, a loafer, a sleek, handsome, common, strutting chunk of muscle and flesh and slim hips, shiny hair, sleepy eyes under long eyelashes, red lips like those of a girl It was said that this Romero had been a little thief and that Don Lorenzo had years ago caught the boy's hand in his own pocket, and—the town added maliciously—this was the place where Romero's hand had remained ever since It was Don Lorenzo's tragedy that not only did he take pleasure in his own sex, but that he loved this one boy, this most unsuitable object of his passion, to desperation Romero, on his part, since he had grown up, had developed a bottomless and indiscriminate appetite for women, the money he spent in his amours he extracted from Don Lorenzo de Lara And Don Lorenzo, knowing all this, bore the degradation of this love like a cross and a crown of thorns He hardly ate, he went around in his shabby old coat, but he bought Romero presents a new waistcoat, bell hose to show off his fine legs, perfume and pomade to make him attractive to the harlots who were the youngster's common company And when Romero got in trouble, when he was injured in a fight, Don Lorenzo lived in glory, for then Romero was weak and helpless and a little boy once more and had no one but him to nurse and console him It was the love of the condemned, the love from which there is no escape

I knew something about that sort of love, maybe that was the reason why we became friends, Don Lorenzo de Lara and I

We settled down under the arcades with books and manuscripts, and I felt safe from my own thoughts for an hour or two The honeybears had curled up in each other's arms and

Loro was quietly occupied cracking peanuts But one of the first lines Don Lorenzo had me read broke my peace

*"A mis soledades voy,
De mis soledades vengo
Porque para estar conmigo
Me bastan mis pensamientos—"*

I stopped and put my hand between the pages Loneliness and my own thoughts were the last things I wished to remember just then "Do we have to read Lope de Vega today, Don Lorenzo ? I am a trifle tired "

"Ah, but don't you feel hot and cold when you read such a line, Doña Clara ? 'Into my solitude I go—'"

It only made me sad "I'm sorry, Don Lorenzo I am stone deaf when it comes to literature, maybe because I was overfed on it all my life "

"Of course, Doña Clara, I understand You are French Racine, Molière Descartes—oh, what a great light shines from your Descartes ! And how thoughtless of me ! Perhaps it was Beaumarchais's political comedies which led your family to the guillotine—"

"Not quite, Don Lorenzo" I hesitated and then I came out with the truth "You see, I grew up in Germany In Weimar, whose population is said to consist of five thousand poets and a few inhabitants "

It was a revelation which threw Don Lorenzo into a cataract of excitement, quotations, and literary comment "It is not possible," he cried "Weimar ! Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Humboldt ! The cradle of thoughts and ideas—the community of world citizens—tell me, Doña Clara, and did you see these great ones in the flesh ? 'Name ist Schall und Rauch umnebelnd Himmelsglut'—Faust—and let me try to remember, what is it Schiller's Don Carlos says ? 'Geben Sie Gedankenfreiheit, Sire' Freedom of thought ? He did not know Spain, your great Schiller, to ask her King for freedom of thought Freedom of thought—oh, my poor, poor Spain !"

In Guanajuato, where the inquisitors still had their ear to every keyhole these were brave, shockingly strong words "Poor Spain ?" I said, because I had noticed the widow's black shadow swish past behind the purple vine "Spain is rich, she does not need our pity "

"Oh yes, pity her, Doña Clara, pity the greatness that was Spain, for what we are watching is the suicide of a great empire, and that's a tragic spectacle Greed, slothfulness, bigotry on all sides The King of Spain is an imbecile, the Queen a man-crazy degenerate, the Court is rotten, the idea of justice perverted The Church is choking in her own power and arrogance, and the Inquisition is our disgrace before the whole world But the people of Spain, ah, Doña Clara, you should know the people! There never were such people as the Spanish are, with so much strength and pride and inborn honour Don't judge the Spanish people by the sorry samples you meet here, these venal little officials, these bootlickers and climbers, these ignorants and braggarts they are not Spain They are the backwash of a great country, they are the debris that's floating on the surface of the waves for yet a while, after the ship has sunk——"

"Don't let Don Felipe ever hear such things," I warned "He is a sworn royalist and a devout son of the Church of Spain"

"Ah, that's something different again Permit me to say that perhaps I understand Don Felipe in this a bit better than you may He is no fool, he knows that Carlos IV is not worth a cobbler's patch and he is quite aware what outrages are committed in the name of the Church, what vices are covered by the bishop's purple, and what nests of iniquity some of the converts represent What Don Felipe believes in is the idea of royalty, not the person who happens to wear the crown The idea of an all-forgiving, all-understanding instance between man and God, and not the fallible persons who represent the Church And there we are back where we started The idea, Doña Clara, the thought is the only thing of lasting value The idea is the greatest power there is Without the idea of the universe, there is no universe Without the thought of God, there exists no God—and now, for the sake of your pronunciation, let me persuade you to read a few more lines from Lope de Vega "

Shortly before six o'clock Felipe broke into my room with the force of a young hurricane and I forgot everything and rushed into his arms as if the house were on fire "Caralinda, thou, my heart, my soul, my light, my love, I haven't seen you for so long, I thought I couldn't stand it another minute Is my hair white? Did I shrivel up and turn into an old man

since we were last together ? That's how I feel Thou, oh, thou——”

“Why did you not come last evening ? I waited so for you ”

“Don't ask me Some confounded, blasted, damned business matter I simply had to see this fool Andreas Ruiz about a problem I have to bring up before the Tribunal de la Minerfa ”

“Well—did you see him ?”

“What is it to you ? Come and kiss me Yes, I saw him ”

“At his house ?”

“No At La Rosaura's,” Felipe said simply All wind went out of my sails and I felt myself getting limp

“You could not find a more respectable place for a business meeting ?” I said lamely

“More respectable, perhaps But none more favourable There is no better place for friendly negotiations than La Rosaura's You meet everybody there, you hear all the mining news And La Rosaura is a good woman She likes me Come to think of it, she was the one who let me know that I could buy La Ramita cheaply Without La Rosaura there would have been no bonanza for me ”

“Does that mean that I will have to get used to your spending your evenings in a brothel ?”

“Once in a while, yes It was very useful that I went up there last night Ask Roberto, he will tell you ”

“Was Bert Quaile there too ?”

“Of course he was He watches over me like a fat old brood hen He does not trust my sense of business, and he has all the figures in his mind ”

“Would it interest you to know that Ruiz was singing under my balcony at all hours of the night ?”

“Not at all hours, dear heart, not at all hours He did not leave La Rosaura's until midnight ”

“So Andreas Ruiz left—but you stayed on——”

“Only for a little while, Caralinda Not later than till two or so And when I departed I was played out You would not have enjoyed my company then, Chiquita ”

“I am thankful for your frankness So you stayed at La Rosaura's until you were a wreck What did you do to exhaust yourself like that, in heaven's name, what did you do ?” I cried, for that is the sort of inane questions jealousy puts into one's mouth

"I played billiards," Felipe answered with such complete sincerity, with such a disarming air of innocence, that it knocked the breath out of me

"You played billiards!"

"Yes, I played billiards You know that I like to play billiards It was a fine game I gave Roberto forty points and still won hand over fist"

"And you want me to believe that? You talked business with Ruiz and you played billiards? And for that you are spending a night at the brothel?"

"Part of the night, only part of it, Caralinda What else can I do if the only billiard table in Guanajuato stands in La Rosaura's house? If it would not take so long and if it were not of such a complication I might try to order one from Madrid and put it in our sala, but—" Suddenly he stopped, tilted my face up, stared at me, and burst out laughing

"What else did you think I was doing at La Rosaura's? You little fool, you stupid little monkey brain! Did you really believe for one second that I would as much as look at the garbage Rosaura has to offer? What do I have to do to make you understand that I love you and only you? It is a disgrace, but since I know you I feel not the slightest inclination to have anything to do with other women I do not lie, I have never lied to you in such matters Great God in heaven, what a need I have of you and how you have spoiled me for all the rest of them! Come to bed with me and you shall see—"

"Don't you try— Felipe, listen—you haven't eaten yet— dinner is ready—" I mumbled

"Dinner can wait I can't"

The widow rustled away from the keyhole On my bed, Eva looked at Adam and the snake grinned wickedly at them both

A good man, Felipe said of Bert Quaile Yes, a very good man, maybe the best man I ever knew, warm and comfortable like a broad stove and very funny at times His Spanish was a comedy in itself, it sounded as though he had sat on every vowel and squashed it out of shape It made Don Lorenzo tear his hair and Felipe laugh out loud

"Where did you learn your wonderful Spanish, Mr Quaile?"

"Oh, that? Smuggling Monongahela rye down the Ohio

River and past the Spanish border into Louisiana, ma'am
And in the Peruvian mines "

He was a lumbering giant with the disproportionate, long torso and arms, the enormous chest and shoulders, and the short legs of a bear. He was pink of skin and had no hair to speak of—"Lost my pelt with the malarial fevers, ma'am"—and eyes so light as to be almost colourless. Towards the outer corners these eyes hung downwards in a queer slant, as if they were suspended from a nail high in the centre of his forehead. His lower lip, too, had this downward trend, and his mouth stood perpetually open—"Got my eardrums busted in a blast in the coal mines when I was a boy, ma'am. Got to listen with my teeth."

At first Quaile and I viewed each other with equal dislike. To him I was That Woman whom Felipe had brought along from God knew where and for whom he spent too much money. As for me, I was frankly jealous of Quaile because he represented that side of Felipe's life from which I was strictly excluded. Roberto was part of the mine and the work and the deep shaft and the bonanza and the ambition, the struggle, the hope, and the future.

"Listen, ma'am, it isn't wise of you to make the boss spill his money around like crazy," he told me after Felipe had paid a fortune for a Flemish tapestry of questionable pedigree. "And don't tell me that it isn't my business, because it is."

To me, all the luxuries Felipe heaped upon me were just so much carmoisine brocade, but if he had been the prudent, reckoning man Quaile seemed to be, I would have loved him less. "It's not in my power to either make him spend or to prevent him from it," I said angrily. "And since he takes a king's ransom out of his mine every week—"

"Aye. You only know how much he takes out but not how much we have to put in again. And you wouldn't understand even if I tried to explain it to you. But seeing that you have more influence with Felipe than I—"

Ever so often Felipe would bring Quaile along in the evening and they would spread out their lists and tabulations and diagrams on the large table under the bright new Argand lamp that was such a luxury in itself, murmuring, Quaile would add up his figures. Down into the belly of La Ramita went the fortunes it cost to pay for the men and the mules and the horses working in never-ending shifts, day and night. Down there

went the wood and the labour it took to support the galleries and to follow the vein deeper and deeper into the rock Down there went pumps and hoists and machinery of the sort Felipe had seen and studied in Germany and which Roberto, panting and sweating, tried to understand and construct from Felipe's inept sketches Most of the time, it appeared, these newfangled contraptions did not function, and then two very crestfallen men would brood over their drawings, and there was a heavy consumption of Catalán brandy on such evenings and I would go to bed alone, angry at Quaile for keeping my lover from me A fortune went into the construction of the retaining walls which were to support San Ysidro, the old, drowned shaft, while the efforts of draining it went on and on, and Santa Clara, the new deep one, appeared sometimes like an insatiable monster for ever gulping down men and work and money into its black enormous gullet I had never seen the two shafts of which I heard so much, because Felipe kept me strictly away from La Ramita, in the deep-rooted belief of all miners that a woman in a mine meant bad luck, if not ruin and catastrophe

There was a drought during the second summer I lived in Guanajuato, and when by the end of August no rain had fallen, the cisterns were empty, the people thirsty, and the cattle dying in the pastures, the statue of Nuestra Señora was brought out of the Parroquial church and carried around in solemn procession Two days later it promptly began to rain, in fact, it seemed as if the prayers had been somewhat too fervent, because the rains soon became a torrent and the torrent a furious, lashing storm Every one of the peaks surrounding the town had its own lightning and thunder, the flashes and crashes overlapped each other, and the rivers rose, flooded bridges and streets, turned the steep narrow lanes of the poor districts into waterfalls, and made the lower parts of the town all but impassable

My household had been gripped by a mild panic, the widow Uvalde had crept into her bed and pulled every obtainable cover over her frightened head Consuelo and Chepito had made themselves invisible, and Lupe was crying in the kitchen I had deployed my silver washbasin, various pitchers, and even the elegant chamberpot to catch the water that leaked into the room, I had fanned the charcoals on the silver brazier into a pleasant glow and was waiting for Felipe, when Tío Lalo ushered in the thoroughly soaked figure of Bert Quaile

"Mind if I swim in?" he said "Lord, what a lot of water it's pouring out tonight Has the boss not come yet?"

A dark puddle formed around his boots, he peeled off his overcoat and untied a handkerchief with which he had, with complete disregard for his dignity, covered his hat He put a finger into the collar at the back of his neck, shook himself like a wet dog, and a stream of water came running down to the floor

"I was sure the boss would be here by now Well, he'll come presently Got to talk to him"

"Is your horse taken care of?"

"Had to leave it at the Refugio with the boy Couldn't get through Might as well have paddled a canoe Say, ma'am, and aren't you afraid of the thunder? Most ladies are But I noticed before you're the plucky kind"

I asked Tío Lalo to bring blankets and something to drink and persuaded the dripping giant to peel off some of his drenched garments, draped around the charcoal fire, they were steaming and drying Over a few glasses of hot spiced wine Quaile began to feel more comfortable "It's downright cosy here," he said, "only thing I'd wish for now would be a nice large fireplace and the water kettle singing on the hob, as we had it at home But these people here don't know how to make life pleasant All for show and nothing to warm a man's inside"

"Where is your home, Mr Quaile?" I asked, to make conversation until Felipe's arrival

"Mingo Creek, near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, ma'am I'm a Westerner, what they call a Yahoo in the Union" He sneezed, excused himself, and remarked wistfully "Buttered rum might help, but a bottle of whisky would be better Nothing like Monongahela rye to ward off a head cold I tried to smuggle some in from Louisiana, but believe you me, it's easier to bring in fifty flasks of contraband mercury than one single bottle of whisky Wonder where Felipe is keeping himself He told me to be sure to see him tonight"

"Maybe he meant to meet you at La Rosaura's," I said coldly

"No, not in this weather There won't be anybody up there tonight," Quaile answered complacently

"But if it didn't rain, you and Don Felipe would enjoy visiting that bawdyhouse, wouldn't you?" I remarked, resolved to learn the complete bitter truth

"Oh yes We both like to play billiards, the boss is the best damned billiard player in town and I'm the worst one, but I just love to play against him, and he laughs himself half sick when he is beating me He's always beating me, but I don't give up Not me, ma'am Aside from the billiards, it's a good place, La Rosaura's, even if you call it a bawdyhouse She's a good sort, the old girl Excuse me, ma'am, maybe I shouldn't talk like this, but you see, I'm hardly used to talking to a lady, having spent most of my life in mining camps and among roughnecks of my own sort Maybe I shouldn't mention La Rosaura's in your presence at all Naturally, there are girls, and there's a lot of drinking and gambling and rough play going on up there But on the other hand, it isn't quite what you might think It's more like a—well—like a club The men gather there and they feel more at ease than with their own ladies and wives and daughters, who're all so refined and precious and educated You see, ma'am, it's like this A fellow comes here and he is poor and he hasn't learned much and all he knows is a bit about mining and maybe a bit about assaying or amalgamation, and all he's got is a stubborn head and a strong back and some luck And some day he strikes it rich and suddenly he is a great man and he hands out money, sends gifts to the King, builds a convent or something, and then he is made a conde or a marqués Well, does that make another man of him? Of course not He's just the same tough common fellow he was before But he marries some fine señorita, and his son is a studied nobleman and his daughters are marquesas, and they giggle when the old man has no manners and they're furious when he falls asleep in the theatre and steps on everybody's toes at the ball So he goes to La Rosaura's and meets his old friends and they talk about their mines the way old miners talk and he doesn't have to watch his manners with the girls Furthermore," Quaile explained sensibly, "furthermore, there is no other place where you can get such useful information Let a vein be discovered, or a mine begin to get borrasca, or a claim be stolen, or a swindle of some sort be perpetrated—La Rosaura's is the place where you'll hear about it first It's the place where men babble out their secrets, and for twenty reales you can buy a thousand pesos' worth of information from some girl But it's getting late I wish to heaven the boss would come soon Got to ask his opinion on how to handle that little trouble we had at La Ramita today"

"Trouble at the mine?"

"It's not important, but I have to know how the boss wants me to handle it before the morning shift comes in," he said "It's just that one of our foremen was killed by his caballito, and now the question is should we give him a good lashing and kick him out of La Ramita or should we hand him over to the authorities who'll probably hang him?"

"Hang him? A horse?"

"Well, no, a caballito is not a horse, not at all, ma'am," Quaile said, profoundly amused "It's what we call the fellows who have wooden seats fastened on to their backs to carry and trot the foremen around So, what this caballito did, he took a little pup with him into the pit, and the next day, he comes crying big tears, says a rock killed his pup A few days later the men down there complain that the cadaver of that pup is still in the pit and that he's begun to stink to high heaven So the caballito is ordered to get his dead pup the hell out of there, and what does the foreman find? They have filled the dead pup with crushed ore like you stuff a turkey with bread and sage, except it didn't smell that good, it had all been a put-up job for stealing silver between the men and this caballito Naturally, the foreman gives him a good hiding to constitute an example The caballito takes his lashing without a sound, because Indios never complain, as if they didn't feel pain the way we do Next thing, he turns against this foreman and beats him to death with a rock, and the whole crew down there takes his side, and it is true, that foreman was a bad fellow and had no heart for his workers On the other hand, we can't let them get away with robbery and murder That's why I need Felipe's opinion,"

"What are you going to suggest, Don Roberto?"

"I'd try to avoid unrest, we can't afford to slow down the work just now And—Look here, ma'am, would you mind if I were to ask you a favour? You're not Spanish, see, neither am I, and it sounds so funny when you're calling me 'Don Roberto' Couldn't you just call me Bert as my mother did? It would seem more—well—more natural Seeing that the two of us are the only blond people in the whole blasted Intendencia My mother was German, you are German too, aren't you?"

"I—well—not exactly—" I stammered in great embarrassment "I'm—I'm of French descent, more or less—"

"All right, ma'am, so you are of French descent Not much of a liar, are you? To me it doesn't make one grain of difference whether you're a French princess or a German chamber-maid Personally, I'd prefer the latter I just thought it might do you good to relax a little once in a while and prattle a little in your own language"

I measured the good-natured twinkle in his light, shrewd eyes and gave in "How do you come to know so much about me?" I asked in a prickling blush

"Well, I get my information here and there, had a letter from a friend of mine, the Licenciado Pedro Arrellano, who saw you in New Orleans before you were a princess Does it matter?" he said in German He spoke a funny dialect, yet it was restful to step out of the relentless formalism of Felipe's language for once

"Did your mother teach you German?"

"Yes, and my grandmother There are many Germans in Pennsylvania My father comes from a Scotch family, though He's a Presbyterian, and a very strict one at that Would rather drop out of church than accept Watts's hymnal, my stiff-necked old man Of course when I was a little boy we had no real church in our backwoods, people got together under a broad old tree and all our dogs would sit around on their tails and listen to the word of God During the sermon you could hear the birds chittering and the horses munching the cropped grass where they were tethered and the cattle chewing their cud, it's a very full, satisfying sound to me, and I don't know that I have ever heard a better sermon than under that tree And when we sang our hymns our voices sounded very small and meek in the wide-open air, and that's as it rightly should be before the Lord Mind if I ask you something? You're a true Christian, aren't you—I mean a Protestant? But I hear that you're going to Mass ever so often It doesn't seem right, does it?"

"I don't think it is wrong, Mr Quaile I do it to please Felipe—and—well, the town would be awfully scandalized if I wouldn't go to church, and things would be still more difficult I—I have to compromise a trifle and it really doesn't seem important, for God is in every church," I said, for I came from Weimar where no stress had been laid at all upon religious matters "My servants would all run away if they thought me a heretic," I said with an embarrassed little laugh "I am

surprised your miners are not afraid the mine will cave in, what with an infidel as administrator ”

“ Our miners are heathen at heart, for all their carryings on with their santos The only faith they can understand is their good old savage faith in magic Well, arithmetic and geometry and a good solid knowledge of engineering are strong magic, too, and a fairly rare magic in Mexico, and I’ve made them trust in it ” He chuckled comfortably “ Two years ago, when there was an eclipse, they almost killed me Thought the devil was eating up the sun because I did not pray to the Virgen So I made some strong magic and five minutes later the eclipse was past I’m a Presbyterian, ma’am, and I have twice the size and three times the weight of any of those Mexicans Would be a crying shame if I couldn’t stand up against them for my own faith ”

“ Felipe says you know more about mining than the entire Escuela de la Minería in the Capital Where did you study it ? ”

“ Well, ma’am, that’s a long story I didn’t precisely what you’d call study, for we were poor backwoods people and my father returned from the Revolutionary War with a bad misery in his back and so I went to work in the coalpits as a little lad of eight—— What are you smiling at ? ”

“ Nothing, I was just picturing you as a towheaded little boy all black with soot But pray go on, Mr Quaile ”

I forgot being jealous and began to like that lumbering mountain of a man as he took me into the coalpits of his childhood and over the rocky roads of his education I watched him earn his first pennies towards his ultimate goal and went with the twelve-year-old to the newly founded Academy of Pittsburgh where he was initiated in the overwhelming adventure of learning to read, write, and manipulate figures and sums It was touching to hear him tell about the soul-shaking experience of learning, about the inborn hunger for knowledge, about the miracle world which opened up for him in the laws of mathematics and geometry “ You remember what it says in the Bible, ma’am ‘ And the earth trembled and the curtain in the temple tore in two ’ I hope the Lord will forgive me for quoting Scripture in connection with my own insignificant person But it is the only way I can describe how I felt after I had solved my first simple problem in higher mathematics ! The earth trembled and the curtain tore in two The great universities are not for a poor frontier farmer’s son, and I had

to dig up my learning as you dig up tree stumps before you may plant a field. I was only fifteen then, but a great big lumbering jackass, and I got work as a stevedore down at Chesapeake Bay. Carried loads all day long, and that was a good school, too, believe me, ma'am. I know which muscles hurt and I can judge when a man has carried all he can without killing himself. Earned my money in the sweat of my brow, as the Lord has ordered it, and bought books for going on with my studies. That's when I did my first bit of engineering. At night, when I wanted to study, naturally I was tired and would fall into a doze ever so often. So I tied a belt round my neck and fastened it to a rope and pulley, and at the other end I had a bell and every time my head would drop the bell jangled and woke me up. Later one of the shipowners, a Mr Benjamin Beecroft, took me into his office, made me sweep it and run errands, and when he discovered that I had a clear handwriting and could reckon he made me a clerk. And in the meantime Mr Gunkel became my teacher. I never saw a man with greater knowledge—I think it is called a 'universal education' nowadays—and what Mr Gunkel did not know was not worth knowing. He was a German by birth and had studied the sciences abroad. I taught him some English and in return he taught me most of what I know about engineering. Even now, ever so often when I have a hard nut to crack, I think If I could only ask Mr Gunkel for his opinion. But he died in that bad yellow fever epidemic they had in Philadelphia in 1793. As for me, I had gone back to coal mining, to gain some practical experience. And what experience, at times, ma'am! Once fourteen of us were buried in a gallery five foot high for twelve days. That's when I lost my hair. A nice towheaded little boy, my foot! First I ate my candle, then I ate my belt, then I began eating my buckskin pants. If we had been down there a few days longer we'd have begun eating each other. But we all came out alive in the end, and, listen, this will make you laugh every one of us went back to mining. Aye, ma'am, education is not acquired in a day. Mind if I smoke a pipe?"

I could not help thinking of Weimar, where there was such an overflow of knowledge, humanistic tradition, finest culture, that it was almost a sickness, where learning and instruction were as common as blackberries and schools were something almost impossible to avoid. And I could not help being moved by this man who had worked on his education as one works in

a quarry He tamped the tobacco down and smiled contentedly back into his past while he picked up a piece of glowing charcoal with the silver tongs and lit his pipe

"It's a long time, though, since I left our log cabin back home, and things have changed On a night like this, if our flint got damp and wouldn't catch on, one of us had to ride six miles to the nearest neighbour's and borrow fire, and it wasn't easy to bring the embers home alive in the pot Aye, ma'am, and by now Pittsburgh is quite a place, and what I'm reading about the Pennsylvania turnpike sounds almost too good to be true I get the Pittsburgh *Gazette* regularly, albeit some two or three months late I wish I could go home soon, while things are going forward by leaps and bounds That's all I want, to go home and try my hand in politics I've been around and seen a lot and figured a lot and I think I could do some good in my own country "

"And why don't you, Bert?"

"Because when I left I promised myself I'd not return but as a rich man You see, my country is a fine country, best country in the world, particularly now that Mr Jefferson won the elections But for all that, it is a rich men's country, founded by rich men and with rich men's laws That's the worm in the apple, ma'am That's what my nation will have to cope with for many generations to come We have abolished King George and put the dollar on the throne It is regrettable, ma'am, but in my country if a man doesn't know how to earn a mint of money he is considered a dolt If he has not enough sense to become rich, he certainly has not enough sense to vote, that's the reasoning of certain legislators, and that's why a very great part of the nation can't vote and has no voice nor influence "

I knew nothing about the United States of North America, less about its politics, and words like union, Mr Jefferson, legislation, vote, might as well have been Chinese "But aren't you rich enough, Mr Quaile?" I asked, bewildered "There is the bonanza and—"

"That's Felipe's bonanza, not mine," he said dryly "If I were rich, do you think I would be spending my best years in the mines, in this godforsaken place where your shafts are drowning while you have to coax your water power drop by drop from those piddling, stinking little rivers? In this country that's so far from home you might as well be living on the

moon! Get rich quick, that's what I thought when I left home, well, it was a bad joke, ma'am!"

In Peru he had almost died of the fever, and his gold had been stolen from him while he lay unconscious. In Mexico he had tried to be clever and had been foolish. "You can't touch mercury without burning your hands," he said, "I tried to break the Spanish monopoly and it almost broke me. All the mercury our amalgamation mills need must come from Spain, but then, Spain hasn't enough of the stuff to send to the Colonies. Well, and here came Bert Quaile from Pittsburgh, with his simple North American mind, and thought that mining quicksilver in Mexico would be an adroit answer to the problem, because there is more than enough of it in these mountains to send supplies to Spain instead of vice versa. But the Virrey and his men had good reasons for keeping mercury scarce and, ma'am, you can't imagine what happened when they discovered that I, in my small way, might throttle the flow of bribery and corruption at the source. If it hadn't been for Felipe, who bought me out of my troubles, I would hardly have stayed alive. It will take some time yet before I'll have worked off the money I owe him. And only then, with the help of God, may I begin all over again to try getting rich enough to go home."

I was more bewildered than before. "I don't quite understand," I said. "If you would speak with Felipe—he is generous and not ungrateful—he always tells me that he could never have constructed the Santa Clara without you—"

"That's it, precisely. He is generous, but he is not that sort of a fool. He might be romantic as all hell with you, but not when it comes to La Ramita, and I wouldn't respect him if he were. His interest lies in keeping me tied down to his mine, not in sending me off on my way with all the money I owe him. We're good friends and we understand each other perfectly. I wish he would come, though. It's getting late, and I have talked much too much. But thanks for listening to me, ma'am."

"And thank you, Bert, for telling me all these interesting things," I said, and held out my hand across the table. "By golly, it feels funny to hold a little paw like yours," he said clumsily. "It's been years since I've been holding hands with a girl. Well, I reckon a fellow can't have everything." He sighed a little and I pulled back my hand.

"There's something I've wanted to tell you for some time, ma'am," he said in great sweating embarrassment "I've got to ask your forgiveness, I was mistaken about you when the boss brought you with him, I didn't think much of you, but I had you all wrong. I've watched you fairly closely and I want to say this to your face. You're a fine woman, you're as fine a woman as ever set foot in this town, and seeing as you are the only one to keep Don Felipe on an even keel—what I mean to say is, I'm glad to know you, and I'm your obedient servant and I'm at your disposal, if you should ever need me. And I'm not saying this the Spanish way I mean it."

It was cosy in the house with the closed shutters, but outside the storm grew worse and lasted all through the night. The Plazuela turned into a lake, the bridges disappeared one by one, and, as usual in bad weather, nobody could either leave or enter the town. It was impossible for Felipe to get through to the house and just as impossible for Quaile to get out. At midnight I bade Tío Lalo prepare some sort of bed for him on the floor of the sala and wished him a good rest. In the morning the storm had calmed down, the sky was deep and blue, the air light and mild. Chepito informed me that Quaile had left at dawn.

But something in my household had changed overnight, from the widow down to the youngest scullery maid I could feel the change. They giggled and whispered, they stared and sniffed, they had something insolent and almost patronizing in their manners, all obedience had gone out of them and been replaced by an unspoken, intangible, lenient intimacy. As if Doña Dolores de Uvalde, Lupe the cook, Consuelo the maid, the rascal Chepito, and Tío Lalo, my friend, as if the entire servants' quarters, as if even my honeybears had only waited for the moment I would show my true colours and begin to cheat the master in whose pay we all were.

Between me and Felipe it came to a scene of earthquake proportions. We screamed at each other across a ravine, no bridge between us, no rope, not a foothold, only that black, bottomless chasm between two strangers incapable of comprehending each other. To Felipe, the Spaniard, it was inconceivable that a man might spend a night alone in the same house with a woman without going to bed with her. To me, raised in a society where respectful friendship between the sexes was the rule, it was just as inconceivable that such an

absurd suspicion could enter my lover's head. For ten endless minutes we hated each other, insulted each other, spitting, hissing, and crackling like two volcanoes in eruption, we hurt each other as only two lovers may who know every weakness, every sensitive, unprotected spot into which to sink their daggers. Felipe slapped me, I cried, and it ended as most lovers' quarrels end. It was like the thunder and storm and uproar of last night, not much damage was done, and the skies were serene again.

Only that something was not quite the same as before. Not between Felipe and Quaile, and not between Quaile and me.

In the evenings, when they were working under the Argand lamp together, there was now often an unspoken tension, and the noise of a sudden disagreement would break through the calm surface. They were fighting over technical problems, over improvements which Quaile suggested and Felipe rejected. Over the best way to handle the miners. The Conde de Valencia gave his workers a share of the ore they brought to the surface, just fair and sensible, said Quaile. Imbecile and ruinous, said Felipe. They would quarrel over questions of a most urgent importance whether to be prudent and terminate the Santa Clara shaft at its present fifteen-hundred-foot level, or whether to drive it on and on, down to Felipe's fantastic dream of the real Veta Madre at twice that depth. And, again, they would quarrel about nothings, as, for instance, the pedigree of Andreas Ruiz's new horse. Sometimes they would fight over subjects evaporating in the blue haze of the purely metaphysical freedom, justice, equality. And all the time my instinct would tell me that they were really quarrelling over me.

I remember one evening when it came to a veritable cock-fight between the two men. I had brought up the subject myself, for it was something which often confounded me, and that particular evening my nerves were in an upset and turbulent state for a certain reason I had kept to myself. "I can't understand it," I said to Felipe, "all this sharp separation of castes and races and colours, this perpetual comparing of shades and hues of the epidermis. All the silly pride in being white, whiter, the whitest. All the insult in being called an Indio, a Mestizo, a Criollo. Only yesterday I saw two ruffians, as brown as chocolate, fight in the street and yell at each other 'I'm every bit as white as you are, you Prieto!' And what about Señor Ortiz, who paid a fortune for the ambiguous

permission to call himself 'white,' while he is as dark as your darkest tunnel? Does the royal decree make him one whit whiter? It seems an idiocy to me In Weimar our Goethe had that warm brown Mediterranean skin and we thought it beautiful, but here he would be an outcast, and Poor Albert with his face like pot cheese a ravishing success And what about the Criollos? Will you please, please, explain to me why you look down on the Criollos?"

"Well, what about them? Why do you worry your fair little head about the Criollos, Blanquitísima? It appears to me that you're talking much nonsense We have conquered the Mexicans A handful of Spaniards by their valour conquered a multitude of Mexicans, therefore we are the masters, *basta!* If you wish for a sermon on equality you must speak to Roberto, it is his foible"

"I never said that I believe in the equality of men," Quaile said ponderously, "with all respect for Mr Jefferson, than whom there is no better man in the entire Confederation, I don't believe it self-evident that God has created man equal That's pure eyewash God has created men different, and it would be a sore world otherwise What I do say is Give every man an equal chance from his birth on and let's see what every man can make of himself under equal and right conditions And by the right conditions I mean conditions which are neither so soft as to spoil a man and make him weak and flabby, nor so hard as to stunt or break him But I suppose it takes a tough North American stomach to digest the idea of the Brotherhood of Man and it doesn't go down so well with your Spanish pride"

"May I in all humility remind you then that we, in our Spanish pride, have freed the *Indios* of slavery long ago? While, I understand, in your free Confederation one sixth of the population are black slaves In fact, since North America has acquired our former colony of Louisiana, the import of slaves has grown beyond all limits," Felipe said coldly

"That's true, Don Roberto" I took Felipe's side That I addressed Quaile as Don Roberto when Felipe was present and called him Bert when we were alone was one of the tiny fissures which some day were to become wide cracks

"I am duly blushing for my nation, ma'am, but believe me that only a very small, very selfish, and, moreover, a very shortsighted minority of people insists on buying or trading or

employing slaves. The mills of democracy, unfortunately grind slowly, and there is much inertia and ignorance to be found in our young Congress yet. Would you believe that it took Congress five years to decide whether slaves were people or something of the order of cattle? But with some patience—

"Ah! And what did your enlightened Congress decide in the end, Roberto?" Felipe asked scornfully.

"Congress compromised and declared that five slaves are three people," said Quaile with an amused, good-natured, and self-deprecating chuckle. But Felipe chose to remain stiff and haughty.

"There you can see, Caralinda, why I prefer the worst kingdom to the best republic. Can a majority be anything but stupid and ignorant? What you call the rights of man is nothing but mob rule——"

"Of course, to the Spanish Empire the right of taxation is more important than the rights of man——"

"The Indians do not pay taxes. We Spaniards do."

"Not taxes, but tributes to break every bone in their bodies. You wouldn't treat your mules as you treat the Mexicans——"

"We treat them the only way they understand, in fact, we treat them much too well. You know as well as I do that it is impossible to better their lives because they simply want to live in filth and stench and debasement. Spain gave them freedom, good laws, she made Christians of them and saved them from eternal damnation. Our miners are pampered and spoiled—why, only last week I put a hundred gold pieces into the rock before we were blasting, I gave them a rain of gold. And what did they do with it? Played rauella with the gold pieces and drank themselves blind. They are born without sense and reason, they are animals and must be handled like animals——"

"Then see to it that the animals don't break out some day. Do you know why you Spaniards keep the Mexicans under your whip? Because you are scared of them, plain scared, with all your Spanish pride and might, you are scared stiff of the day when Mexico will wake up——"

"Sometimes, Roberto, you bore me to distraction with your Jacobin speeches," Felipe said icily, his nostrils were pinched and waxlike. "And if I should find anyone—do you hear anyone!—spreading this sort of poison in my mine I would have to bring it to the attention of the Holy Inquisition. Is that understood?"

"You could not have expressed yourself any clearer, Don Felipe," Quaile said in a quiet, white-lipped rage as he pushed back his chair, gathered up his ledgers, and slammed out of the door

Later that evening, after the lamp had burned down and there was only the glow of the embers from the brazier and Felipe had emerged from his frozen anger, I pushed my low stool close to his chair and rested my head on his knee

"With all your men's quibbling you forgot to answer my question What about the Criollos? Why do you look down on them? Why are they so jealous of you? They are as white as you and I, as white as the King of Spain, aren't they? I'll never understand that artificial chasm between Spaniards and Criollos"

"Come, come," Felipe said, absently stroking my hair "Do not torment your little head with abstract questions Europeans are Europeans, and Criollos are not quite the same, even if they are white, and you are not going to change it What, in the name of the eleven thousand virgins of Santa Ursula, do you care about the Criollos?"

"I can't help it, Felipe I do care, very much I think of those Spanish parents whose children happen to be born in Mexico, is it possible that parents look down upon their own children because they begot them in a different country? If a mother holds her new-born babe to her breast—does she think Criollo? If a father teaches his little son to speak Castilian—does he despise him because he was not born in Spain? Do parents love their children less for it? And if they do, and if they make a difference between themselves and their little Criollos, isn't that dangerous? Don't you understand that it is a sure way of turning the heart of every Criollo against his own blood and must drive them all into the camp of the Mexicans whom you call Mestizos?"

"Not at all, Caralinda The Criollos know their place They are rightly proud of their pure Spanish descent They are ambitious, but then they have a much higher place in society than the Mestizos and they are not such fools as to throw their prerogatives away by mixing with mixed blood Look around, Caralinda Criollos can become officers in the royal troops or make a career as priests or amass fortunes in the mines, and some have been even titled—about what are you fuming and fretting all of a sudden?"

I held my breath for a moment "Felipe——" I said, taking his hand from my hair and bedding my cheek in his palm "If I had a child—would it be a Criollo? Would you really look down upon your own child?"

"What fantasies are these? I should never allow you to have a child, never" He took my face between his hands and tilted it up to him "I love thee too much to make thee with child," he said softly Tiny blue flames hovered over the glowing charcoal, the darkness turned still darker and Felipe pressed my face between his palms until the pulse in my temples began to throb "Listen, woman," he said fiercely, "our child would not only be a Criollo but also a bastard Listen—and do not forget it I do not want a child from thee Many unwanted children in Mexico die at birth Our child would die too"

"It's not a thing that's easy to forget I may have honey-bears But no child I won't forget it, Felipe," I said, my voice cracked, and, very much against my will, I began to sob Felipe bent down and pressed his forehead in my hair "Forgive me, dear heart," he said almost inaudibly "Forgive me and understand me A child is the one thing I cannot let thee have"

I had wanted a child more than I had ever wanted anything in all my life A child of Felipe's, beautiful, arrogant, strong and weak like Felipe, a little bastard like Felipe Every nerve and vein in my body had wanted that child, that last fulfilment of myself I had talked about it often with the Madonna in my bedroom who also had a child and was the only woman I knew in that foreign land Now I had another talk with her Forget what I begged of you, I said, please, oh, please, forget it I didn't mean it seriously It was all a terrible mistake I did not consider the consequences Forget it

I also had a talk with Consuelo's mother, the curandera I drank the evil brew she gave me and submitted to some ghastly rituals And two days later I held a quiet secret little funeral for a fine, passing, small, tiny hope which left a great gaping emptiness behind

I loved Felipe, but I still did not know him, my eternal stranger

During my third year in Mexico I became pregnant I rode out into the hills all by myself and sat down at the mouth of a cave in the cool shade because I had to think about this new

thing that had entered into me and think it out to the end and come to a decision I stayed up there for many hours and only when the sun went down in the sharp clear yellow sunset of that ochre countryside did I return to town All restlessness had gone out of me, I clenched my fists and set my teeth and made myself hard and invulnerable for the fight to come This is my child, I thought, my child, and I will have it and it will live It is my child, and if I have to run away with it and hide it and be a beggar for it, it is my child and I will have it Even if I have to give up Felipe to keep my child

It was the hardest decision of my life, much harder than it had been to leave Helgenhausen and go away with a stranger But, yes, yes, yes, if I have to choose between Felipe and this child, I will have the child, I said to myself

Felipe had given me many a surprise, but never a greater one than when I broke the news to him He went completely mad with joy He shouted, he laughed, he cried large warm tears, he whispered, he prayed He lifted me off my feet and danced with me through the room, and the next moment he sat me down like a thin fragile glass filled to the rim and circled on tiptoe around me He kissed my hands, my eyes, he knelt before me and held his ear to my belly as if to listen to the mute small life in there He even talked to his son through the walls of my body (it goes without saying that the child was a son), he addressed him as Vuestra Merced, as Your Grace and Your Excellency, he promised him a cradle of gold and advised him not to molest his mother He ran out on the gallery, called the servants together, and threw a rain of silver pieces to them without telling them the reason for such largesse He went down to the stable and whispered the news into his horse's ear He was too excited to eat a single bite, and the wine he drank to his son's future he threw up at once like a hysterical maiden

"What a silly, dear fool you are So much ado about a little bastard, and a Criollo to boot," I said, laughing so as not to cry

"Don't talk such nonsense, I won't hear of it Listen, woman, we have to make plans, great, careful plans How far do you think you are in your pregnancy ? Six weeks, seven, perhaps ? It doesn't leave us much time, but I think I can buy us speed for my money First thing, I have to take you home to the Peninsula and install you there so that you may give

birth to the child in Spain I shall ascertain tomorrow when the next ship leaves Vera Cruz and arrange for the most luxurious travel conveniences available In the meantime, the Pope will have to annul your silly marriage, a marriage which in fact never really existed I intended for quite some time to erect a church at La Ramita , I shall begin the preparations at once and such a pledge may please the Vatican In any case, I shall find means and ways for us to be married before the child is born As for the Escorial—I have it on good information that the star of that scoundrel Godoy is waning, I shall make His Holy Majesty a gift of such magnificence, a contribution towards his war with France which may break out any day now, that he can't but accept in grace my return As for a title—how would you like your son to become the second Marqués de Ramitas y Guera ?" (It was his way of pronouncing my family's name, and La Guera, the blonde one, was also what people called me in Mexico) "Already I put much thought on the design of our matrimonial coat of arms On yours there was an oak tree and a supporting unicorn—I mean on the coat of arms of the Counts of Guera, not the one of the Pontignacs As for me, I thought of a man with a hammer as supporter and three wavy lines in the upper field to indicate water, as on the crest of the Fuentes, and I should like to enter the bend sinister, just to spite my father's sons "

This was the best year in Guanaxuato's brief history yet, and the wealth of the town burned like a fever More and more shafts were driven into the ground, more and more mines were opened, higher and higher went the speculation in new claims, wilder and wilder the rumours of veins and outcrops discovered in the countryside, richer and richer grew the mine owners

In June the new Virrey, Don José de Iturriigaray, visited Guanaxuato, presumably to cut himself a slice of all the wealth He was handsome like an actor playing the role of a Virrey He let it be known that he himself would see to it that the Spanish monopoly on mercury was strictly enforced and that he in person would supervise the allotment of the precious chemical The mine owners understood the menace and greedy purpose underneath the official honour done to them by the exalted visit and pushed enormous presents into the corrupt palms of the man who represented Spain's sovereign The town was intoxicated with her own splendour, and there was such a flouncing of gold tresses and brocades and plumes and

jewellery as could not be outdone by anything in the Capital or even in Madrid. It was such a plethora of everything that it reached a barbaric beauty of its own. Military parades and solemn processions, fiestas and bullfights every day, banners, flags, flowers, colours, boom of salvoes and rockets, and at night illuminations which made the town blaze with a thousand candles, outlined the façade of every palace, and crept with a timid glow up into the hills where the poor people had spent their last claco on ocote and torches and humble little oil lights. From the slope atop the half-finished new granary La Rosaura's terrace displayed the Spanish flag in little red-and-yellow glass lamps, and there were fireworks, receptions, and a ball where the ladies fought tooth and nail for a smile from the new Virrey.

When it all was over and the Virrey left the town with his loot, Felipe had one of his brilliant ideas. For the farewell he appeared dressed more expensively than any one of the young men who were to escort His Excellency as far as Marfil, but it was an outfit of deep ceremonious mourning to express his sorrow over the high departure—black velvet traced with black jet, black stockings and shoes, a black hat with three black plumes on it, and a dress sword in a black scabbard.

"Phew, what a comedy," he said laughingly when he came back and flung off the uncomfortable gala. "You should have seen that old blackguard, that creature of Godoy's, embrace me with tears in his eyes, every single tear at an extra cost of a thousand pesos. But now the road is free for us. Immediately after his return to the Capital he will recommend my full amnesty to His Majesty, and the Archbishop of Mexico has this little matter of annulling your marriage in hand. Of course, you'll have to become a Catholic, my little heathen, but that can be done tactfully and discreetly. Two weeks from tomorrow the Bishop of Michoacán in person will lay the cornerstone of my Church of Santa Clara, after that is done, and weather permitting, we may leave on the *Esperanza* for home."

He said Home, he was already back in Spain, we were married, we had a title, we had a child. He had already proved to his father whatever it was he wanted to prove. Yet there was so much to be accomplished and time was running short.

Impatience was eating Felipe and his cheeks were lean and hungry-looking once more. The millions he needed had to

come out of La Ramita, more, more, more, faster, faster, faster There was this desperate drive, day and night, day and night I hardly saw Felipe any more, and even Quaile began to lose weight Deeper, deeper, deeper went the shaft of Santa Clara In the old, drowned, abandoned shaft of San Ysidro the pumps were panting day and night, day and night, for down there, still covered by one hundred and eighty feet of water, another part of the Veta Madre was to be regained Blast, dig down, open up, drill, hammer, chisel, load, carry, day and night, day and night More men were hired, more mules, more horses loaded with ore, more leather bags filled with the grey rocks to be carried by naked, breathless, sweating men up the perpendicular ladders of the raises Higher pay, premiums for the men, longer working hours, less sleep, more accidents down there, more men fainting, wounded, dying It did not count in the race for the millions Felipe needed, the lives of men were cheap and the return to Spain expensive For three weeks, when the yield fell off, he lived in one of his black, storming rages His credit with the Tribunal de la Minería was strained to the breaking point, so were his nerves The mill which crushed and amalgamated his ore ran out of quicksilver and he had to buy some contraband flasks at an outrageous price Time, time, dear Jesus of Nazareth, give me more time, he moaned I had entered into the fourth month of my pregnancy and the *Esperanza* had left for Spain without us "If we travel with all possible speed— If we find the highways in good order— If the *Reina Isabela* sails according to schedule and with favourable winds—" he counted and calculated He had arranged for our passports, the permission to enter his country, his amnesty for the forsaken accident with Godoy's relative were applied for, he had the archbishop's assurance that the Vatican would remove certain obstacles and bless our marriage Time, all we needed was more time

He worked too hard, he drove himself too cruelly, he ate but little, drank much, he could not sleep, had bad dreams In the middle of the night he would get up, call for Domingo, have his horse saddled, ride off He gambled wildly and for high stakes, he went often to La Rosaura's to relax his taut nerves and came back from there tauter than before Once he had a fight with Bert Quaile Not a quarrel as had become more and more frequent between the two men, but a fist fight in which

neither won and from which both emerged badly battered Quaile gave me his version of it

"All right, so he is the boss and it's his mine and I'm only his administrator But he has only nibbled a bit at mathematics in that Papist seminar of his and I am a learned engineer and I know what I am doing I have driven that shaft as far down as is permissible, and even beyond a certain margin for safety, and if he wants to go any deeper he is stark staring mad and I won't take the responsibility for it After all, we have eight hundred men working on each shift down there and if anything should happen to them I have to account for them before our Lord If he wants to go any deeper I'll wash my hands of it, I'll have nothing to do with it, I'd rather leave La Ramita than go a single foot deeper"

Superficially peace was restored and a compromise made Quaile was to supervise and speed up the digging of a third, a promising new shaft, and Felipe, on his own, blasted beyond the eighteen hundred feet which Quaile had set as a limit At eighteen hundred and forty feet the vein broadened, branched out, and reached the fabulous spread of twenty-three feet It was, in other words, a second bonanza which made the first one look like a thin dribble Felipe was coldly triumphant "I am not surprised, are you?" he said to browbeaten Quaile "I knew it I could draw you with closed eyes a map and show you precisely how the mother lode runs I know that mine like the palm of my own hand Now, Caralinda, I shall have enough money to buy Felipito one of those little kingdoms this upstart Napoleon Bonaparte is carving out of Europe"

A few weeks after the Virrey, albeit with much less pomp and fanfare, another visitor came to Guanajuato

"I have a surprise for you, Doña Clara," said Don Lorenzo, entering the patio one day "A gentleman from Germany who is eager to pay his respects to you"

It took me a moment to remember who this gentleman was and what he represented He was sloppily and very plainly dressed, and his hair hung in an unkempt fringe on to his forehead He looked as if he were in a hurry, as if there were too many things to study and examine to have time for any conventions in manners and dress I recognized the keen, bright eyes, half concealed under the crumpled, low-hanging eyelids, the mark of restless thought on the lively face, and

suddenly all of Weimar, all of home, all of the past, had entered the Casa Contreras

"Baron Humboldt—of all people—what brings you into this corner of the world?" I stuttered

"I might ask you the same, Clarinda," he said "The last time I had the pleasure of meeting you was at your funeral"

I laughed and he laughed too "This will please our friend Goethe no end," he said "He never quite believed in your being dead, the shrewd, impish assayer of the soul" In the first rush of surprise we had both spoken German, but now Humboldt switched politely to Spanish, to include Don Lorenzo in the conversation "The professor told me that I would find a lady from Weimar, but I didn't know whom to expect and he did not know that we are friends of long standing I am indeed very indebted to you, Don Lorenzo, for arranging this meeting"

Never had I seen Don Lorenzo, this world citizen in exile, as radiant before, I understood then how famished he must have been for an exchange of thoughts with a savant of Humboldt's mettle, Don Lorenzo, a man stranded on a deserted island and saved at last, a man captured by cannibals but not quite eaten up yet Humboldt had immediately and without much wondering or questioning accepted the odd fact of my being alive and answered my inquiries in the clear-cut, casual manner I remembered quite well No, Weimar had not changed at all Goethe had been gravely ill but had made a fine recovery The Duke had taken sides with the Prussians, but so far Napoleon had left the little duchy in peace Albert? Well, Poor Albert was busy as ever with his epic, what was it called? *The Hesperides* No, he had not married again and probably never would Did I wish to send any regards or messages to my husband—or to anyone else, for that matter?

No, I said after a brief contemplation I was trying to have my marriage annulled and I did not wish to disturb the procedure by any personal steps of mine "Good, good," Humboldt said "In that case I shall be as silent as the grave, the pretty grave Count Driesen gave you," he said so absent-mindedly that I was almost certain he had not listened to me His eyes had been wandering and came to rest on the purple blossoms of the vine that hung like a rich curtain between the arches of my patio A gleam came into his face, he jumped

up and examined the anonymous plant, it was obvious that this vine intrigued him considerably more than the oddity of my being dead in Weimar yet alive in Guanaxuato

"Incredible," he called out "A bougainvillea, upon my word! And can you tell me how this plant arrived in Mexico, Don Lorenzo? Certainly it is not a native of New Spain Would missionaries have introduced it, like the olive tree? Or would it be another indication of early immigrations from the South Seas? Most, most interesting, don't you think, Professor?"

"How did you call it, Baron? I always wanted to know the name and nobody could tell it to me," I said

"Bougainvillea Named after my eminent friend and colleague, Louis Antoine de Bougainville I must write to the old gentleman about it—"

This was how Weimar discovered me in Guanaxuato and left me with another drop of information out of its cornucopia of universal knowledge I kept musing about the accident which made Humboldt, to whom I meant nothing, the last link between me and my past The evening I had met Felipe, Goethe had spoken about Humboldt, I remembered how we had stood before the map of Spain which Goethe had tacked to his door to trace on it Humboldt's journey in that strange country And now I was going to Spain myself, to give birth to Felipe's child, and Humboldt had come to see me, I sensed something like a hidden pattern in it and I was impatient to tell Felipe about my unexpected illustrious visitor

But Felipe left me waiting all night and came only when the bells were calling for morning Mass and the roosters were crowing and the rose-coloured façade of San Diego was aglow in the sunrise He was pale and stiff like a waxen image and he picked some embers from the brazier and absentmindedly crushed the glowing charcoal in his fingers "What is it, what is it now, Felipe? In the name of God, what happened to you?" I cried

"To me? Nothing You will have to travel to Spain without me, that's all I must remain here until I can find a new administrator for the mine If our child is born before we may be married you may thank your friend Roberto for it He left La Ramita"

"He left— But that's not possible! He left La Ramita?"

"Yes He left La Ramita We had a fight about the shaft and

he left La Ramita Enough I won't hear another word about him Don't mention his name, ever He has no honour "

I had a headache. I had not seen Felipe for three days and my headache had grown worse every day It was an unstable pain which I could not keep fastened to any one place It rolled around in my head with every movement, and at its worst it lodged itself deep down between the vertebrae of my neck It weighed many pounds, and by the second day I could not hold my head up, it sank forward or to the side, and the headache in it rolled with it I tried cold compresses and hot compresses, but either made it worse The widow, enjoying my discomfort, danced every five minutes into my room, patted my pillows, her whispering seemed a roar and her tiptoeing was like the trampling of a herd of elephants on the roof of my head For remedy Consuelo pasted certain green leaves to my temples and I began to itch My eyes hurt and the daylight was of an unsupportable sharpness Consuelo chewed bread, soaked it in milk, filled the mush in little bags, and put them on my eyelids The Madonna over my prie-dieu held her heart in her long-fingered hands, a sword was stabbed through it and it burned with a red-and-yellow flame It gave me a hard pain in my own chest to look at that stabbed heart, and I turned my back to the Madonna The second evening I sent for Dr Medina, a fat old wheezing drunkard whom I distrusted thoroughly He put six leeches on my temples and behind my ears and recommended a letting if I should not feel better in a day After ten minutes I pulled off the sucked-on leeches, stumbled to my silver washbasin, and threw up I was terribly dizzy and the walls revolved around me in a mad dance I returned to my bed, feeling wretched as I had never felt in my life Consuelo brought her mother, the curandera She stood over me with her heavy belly, murmuring to herself, breathing hard, and reeking of chile and garlic She laid her foul-smelling lips on my temples and began to suck the sickness out of me I pushed her away and sat up "I am all right," I said "Thank you very much Here is a peso for the cure Tomorrow I shall be well again "

Before the curandera left she burned some dry herbs in the room and a rather pleasant drowsiness came over me I got lost in some half-sleep and I dreamed of my mother I had been told that my mother had died of a childbed fever two weeks after I was born But she said it had been a mistake She

had not died, she had only been buried, but she was alive I woke up, I did not know whether it was day or night It was dark, the shutters were closed, the wind came in gusts, the wood creaked, the plaster dribbled from the walls

I tried to remember yesterday Yesterday I had begun to make a list of the things I wanted to take with me to Spain But I had to give up in the midst of it because my eyes hurt so My eyes were so swollen now that I could hardly open them I kept them closed and went to Spain

There was a sandstorm in Spain, the hot, yellow, dry grains of sand got under my dress and made my skin itch and burn I tore off the cover, pulled up my nightgown, and began to scratch I groped for the rope on the wall and rang the bell While I waited for somebody to come I was suddenly seized by a chill so cold and strong that it threw me into convulsions My knees and thighs were shaking as if I had nothing to do with them, and I watched them in astonishment At the foot-board of the bed Adam wanted to make love to Eva I was disgusted, deeply disgusted with Adam When the chill was past there came a disgust over me which had no end or bottom I thought of Felipe and I hated the thought of him I tried to imagine something pleasant flowers, fruit, tastes, scents, but everything was breathing the same disgust What then? Please, please, let me think of something nice, something lovely, something beautiful A spring, a waterfall? No, not that It only brought on the chill again Orizaba? What did I know of Orizaba? What a crazy word was that, Orizaba No sense in it, no meaning

The door creaked open and Tío Lalo put his head in I saw him and recognized him through the burning, itching slit of my eyelids "What do you want here? Get out"

"The bell—Your Grace rang the bell," he said

"That was yesterday," I told him

"No, Your Grace, I came as quickly as I could"

"When was yesterday?" I asked him "Is today yesterday?"

He shook his head "The curandera is outside," he said

The curandera stood on the silver threshold, it was a bright day, the shutters were open, and the light cut like a scimitar into my lids She stood there looking at me, but she did not come closer I heard her murmur with Tío Lalo I sat up, I felt very miserable but quite clear

"Send to La Ramita and ask Don Felipe to come to me," I told Tío Lalo "Tell him that I am ill" The door closed and I was left alone

Chills gave way to spells of a violent heat, icy needles in my veins, and then again and again that burning, yellow, itching Spanish sand There were stretches of unconsciousness, interrupted by spells of a great lucidity when I seemed to understand everything and all thoughts solved themselves with the exactness of a mathematical example There were also interims when I was very sorry for myself because I was very ill and this could not be good for Felipito I rang and rang the bell, but no one answered and no one came I listened and I could hear the silence in the house I was terribly thirsty and there was a black, bitter, ugly taste in my throat and my tongue was thick and stuck to the roof of my mouth and nobody came to bring me the glass of water for which I craved so badly that I began to cry At last I got out of bed and waded through brown-and-purple waves of dizziness to the door to go downstairs and fetch a jug of water But before I reached the stairway it all went white, the walls came towards me from all sides, and I had no headache any more

This was how Felipe found me when he came from the mine whither Tío Lalo had trotted on one of our fine grey mules to report that I had come down with the smallpox The widow had been the first to notice the sinister symptoms and had left the house at once, with all her belongings and some of mine The rest of the servants had run away in a panic, scattered in all directions, as if a cannon had been fired among them Their fear of the pox was boundless and not without reason Each generation remembered the ravages of some epidemic which had killed many thousands, for the Mexicans and Indios, more than any other race, lacked either resistance against the disease or the strength to survive the sickness once it had struck

And thus Felipe stayed alone with me in the deserted house and made himself my nurse, my maid, my servant, my physician, he was everything, friend and lover and husband, my mother and father, as the Indios say My gambler, my liar, my fraud, my irresponsible, cruel, stupid, exasperating man, how completely I could count on him! How right, how selfless, how unerringly good and manly he behaved whenever there arose a crisis

He picked me up and carried me to my bed, he undressed

me and washed me and cooled my face and body and put compresses of diluted vinegar on my forehead and around my wrists He opened the windows for fresh air and shielded my eyes against the light He changed my bed linen and spooned medicine into me and pressed the juice of lime and pineapple for me, he cooked some soup , he even combed and braided my hair In and out I went through the tunnels and shafts and dark corridors of delirium, interrupted only by short stretches of clarity Whenever I came up from the dark pit of the fever Felipe was there For days on end he did not get out of his clothes, he did not shave, he hardly permitted himself to fall asleep for a few minutes at a time He was always there, sitting at my bedside or else kneeling before my Madonna and praying He was not afraid of catching the sickness, and if he was repulsed by the foul stench that is part of it and by the ugly sight and by the whole undignified, disgusting mess the disease made of me, he never showed it even with a twitch of his nostrils

First there was the fever, the pain in neck and head, the dry lips, the swollen tongue, the black taste, the evil smell Next my body was breaking out in hundreds of furious, itching, burning pustules They grew, they erupted, they turned black and blue, they were oozing pus and water Felipe was sitting over me and holding my hands "You mustn't touch them Caralinda, you must not scratch Your skin, your lovely skin, my Blanquita, you must not ruin your skin You don't want pockmarks on my lovely face, on my lovely little body which I love so You must be brave, Caralinda , come, sleep a little, I am here, I am watching you "

I fell asleep, but Felipe stayed awake He held my hands, day and night, until exhaustion overcame him He talked to me, he sang to me, he read to me, he told me a hundred little jokes and stories to keep my mind off the unbearable pain-filled itching

"Don't you ever sleep, Felipe ?"

"Don't worry, dear heart I've spent many a night without sleep for far less honourable reasons If I let go of your hands you'll scratch yourself and your beauty will be marred Don't forget that your beauty belongs to me It's pure selfishness that I watch over it "

"Felipe—and what about the mine ? Shouldn't you be in La Ramita ?"

"Oh, hang the mine ! It is more important to nurse you back to health "

"Felipe——"

"Yes, Hijita ?"

"I shall not be well in time to sail for Spain I am afraid Felipito will be a Criollo after all "

His hand went to his scapulary , at once I began scratching my nose without knowing that I did, and he quickly reached out for me and held my fingers tight "It does not matter Nothing matters but that you did not die "

"Felipe," I said, "I have thought much about this If God had wanted Felipito to be born in Spain he would not have stricken me with the smallpox Perhaps God has different plans for our child Who knows, by the time Felipito is a man Mexico will be independent and they will prefer a Criollo to a Spaniard Then Felipito can be their Virey, or their President——"

Felipe snorted a bit "The crazy things that pass through that little fair head," he said "A president for Mexico—you're still delirious !"

"Felipe," I said after a little while, "may I look in the mirror today ?"

"No Not yet Not today, Caralinda I shall let you look in the mirror as soon as you are as lovely as you were before "

But when he left me alone for a few minutes I got up and staggered over to the mirror which hung in its silver frame over my silver washbasin When Felipe came back I was lying in a heap on the floor because what I had seen in that mirror had caused me to faint once more

I woke up in the middle of the night and listened The candle sputtered, the wind pushed against the closed shutters, I had a little pain in the small of my back Felipe had fallen asleep on the chair at my bedside, he had tied a string from my hands to his so that any movement I should make would wake him up My skin was itching everywhere, and there was that small, curiously distant pain in my back The wind had leaped down the steep slopes and across the town and now it came back, knocked at the door, pressed against the windows, and went on its way I was terribly tired and unspeakably weak and my back hurt I had a great wish to turn over and lie on my side, but I did not want to wake up Felipe and I summoned all my will power and did not scratch my face In the fitful light I

looked at Felipe He had shaved, changed into a clean shirt, and flung a robe around his shoulders Sleeping, he seemed still tense and yet utterly exhausted The line from his ear down to his chin was sharp and beautiful, and the skin stretched so tautly over the bone that it glistened I wondered how he could stand the sight of me, the smell, the whole abysmal disgust, and still love me If I should remain disfigured, would I have to give him up ? I wondered From Felipe I could never accept anything less than love If what he felt now for me was pity, charity, if he would go on living with me out of a sense of duty or obligation only, I would have to pack up my child and leave him It was a thought that made me shiver a little, and the pain in my back came closer In a sudden flash of clear-sightedness I perceived that Felipe would be infinitely better off without me He would marry the daughter of one of the noble families, a little virgin fresh from some convent in Spain His father would be proud of him and he would have children, all of pure Spanish blood and born in Spain, with an honest coat of arms instead of a fanciful crest made up of liquorice and something out of a book on heraldry Up to that crushing moment I had always thought that I had given up very much for Felipe, for the first time I saw what he had forgone because of me

Cold, tired, parched, burning, itching In the lap of misery And pains I was frightened I did not dare move I caught for Felipe's long hands and spread them over my cramped body as though he could help me hold the small life that wanted to depart from me If I don't move, I thought, it will pass If I keep very still, if I dare hardly breathe It will pass, certainly, it is nothing It will pass With the warmth of Felipe's hands flowing into my body the pain seemed to subside It had not been very much of a pain A discomfort, not more Perhaps Felipito in there had changed his position, or he had inherited his father's unruly nature and was protesting against my being ill I turned my head towards the Madonna, the small floating flame in the ruby-red glass beneath the picture threw a fine glow upon her hands in which she held her stabbed heart I heard the bells of San Diego ring and I fell asleep

I had the same dream as before, but the torment and anguish of it had grown My mother had not died in childbed, we had buried her but she was alive Then I myself was my mother and I was in childbed, but I did not die and I knew that I would be

buried all the same I fought against being buried alive, and I woke up from my own moaning

Felipe's face was bent close over me and he looked worried
"What is it, Hijita? Does the fever come back?"

"No The pains I was giving birth——"

"A nightmare," Felipe said "Come, drink this, it'll make you sleep"

I dozed off, but the pains knifed into my hazy being-absent and pried the lid off my brief spell of rest and opened me wide up The house shivered in the swift assaults of the moody nightly wind of Guanajuato , Felipe put a fresh candle on the spike and lit it from the old burned-down one I was all pain now, from my cramped, curled toes up to my clamped teeth, to my cranium , it was a tearing pain, a frightening pain, a pain that was all wrong and unnatural, a pain that filled my body so that it turned stiff and coiled up like a hose stuffed too tightly There was no end to the night, no end to the pain I did not moan any longer, I screamed, because only by screaming was I able to breathe And all the time, while I went through a tunnelled labyrinth of nightmares, the cargadores carried rocks on their backs and fought for another breath and yet another one, all through the endless night a file of cargadores was running alongside of me with flagstones from the quarries on their backs , for my patio, for the mine, for the new Church of Santa Clara, flagstones to bury me under Our backs were broken with pain, we were tired, we could not breathe, and we were not allowed to rest Labor de sangre is cheaper, said Felipe

"How late is it, Felipe?"

"I don't know, woman, I know nothing Woman, woman," he said, "what is it, mujercita? What happens with thee?"

"I am losing thy child, Felipe"

Hoofs clattered across the patio, the heavy house door slammed, a horse galloped away on the Plazuela, Felipe was kneeling on my prie-dieu and shouting at the Virgen, shaking fists at her, threatening to throw her out of the house if she would not help But neither did the Virgen help me, nor did the midwife follow the call of a woman sick with the pox At last the agony broke in a warm flood of blood and ebbed away and the blood kept flowing, soaking my chemise, my sheets, the mattress, the bed, it was such a quiet, pleasant flowing away and getting weaker and weaker, and Eva, Bathsheba,

Herodias's daughter were crowding around me and did not care and there was a coolness and a rush as of large wings

"Hold me, Felipe, please hold me, don't let me die, hold me tight "

Many things happened to me which I did not understand because I had gone too far beyond A priest seemed to be there with the Holy Sacrament, but of this I could not be certain A deep, rich voice spoke to me and called me child, beautiful child, Nenita Linda, and two hands, large and soft as cushions, stilled the flow of blood But this softness and rest were brief and then the pains came back, worse than before It was all so very, very wrong, what happened to me, and I struggled to get out of bed and run away, but they had put flagstones on my chest which held me down "Child, beautiful child," said the voice "Nenita Linda poor little one "

Long after this I woke up I had left the tunnels of nightmares behind, I felt very weak but well I touched my face, it did not itch and the skin seemed smooth On the back of my hand I found a few dark, bluish spots, like last week's mosquito bites My head was light and clear By the slant of the sun which fell through the open window I could see that it was early afternoon A ridiculously tiny Negro slave, who had been wandering in and out of my delirium, was standing at my bedside, grinning at me over the bulge of my pillow A diamond ring was pulled through his flat nose

"What's his name ?" I asked "I call him Coco," said the deep rich voice I had heard in my worst pains One of the large hands which had nursed me rested on the finely carved ebony hair I snuffed with amusement an ebony cane Whose ebony cane ? Whose hands, whose voice ? I studied the landscape before my eyes Two green hills with an arroyo between them enormous thighs and a lap, knees like soup plates, concealed by a bulging skirt Then a steep rise to the twin mountains of a bosom utterly out of bounds The neck of a bronze monument On top of it all a fine round head, rather small in proportion to the body A face of hammered bronze, a small nose, large eyes, large earrings, large silver pins holding up a crown of braids like tarnished silver, and everything dominated by a wide, large, smiling mouth betraying many healthy appetites

"I'm La Rosaura," the enormous woman said "And don't you think that you're seeing another fever apparition I'm

every ounce as fat as I look, and, what's more, I don't mind and I still like to dance the fandango So you've at last decided to get well again, child ? It is high time We've been waiting for it more than a week "

"Did you—were you here all the time ? Did you nurse me through ?"

"Don Felipe sent for me, he was half out of his mind Men are such useless creatures, aren't they ? Except for the one thing in which they excel Clearly, a woman was needed here "

"I don't know how to thank you——"

"*Por nada*," she said "For nothing I didn't run any risk I had my dose of the pox before I was laid by a man for the first time, which was at the age of twelve, and I have had this face like an old copper pot ever since," she said, pointing at her bronze skin with the small marks as from a goldsmith's tools

"Where is Felipe ?" I asked quickly

"Aha ! Where is Felipe ! He's asleep, this Felipe of yours I don't think he had six hours of sleep in the last three weeks, the fool I took him by force, undressed him, and threw him on a couch He was out before he hit the mattress "

"Is he angry with me ?"

"Angry with you, Nenita ? Why should he be angry with you ?"

"I lost his child——"

"He'll make you another one, no cause for worry Felipe is the man to make you more children than you may wish for Never have I seen a man as much in love as this Felipe is with you 'Don Felipe,' I've told him a hundred times, 'you bore me with your emotion, you're becoming monotonous' It's Caralinda, Caralinda, Caralinda, every minute Whenever he doesn't play billiards he is talking about you"

She gave me a quick glance and began to laugh deep in her throat "You might think it a joke that your Felipe makes his confessions to me, of all the people But I am the friend of many men and they know it In my profession I would be a failure if I did not understand men and like them, and if I did not keep their secrets to myself Let me tell you one thing, Nenita Love is a very rare thing, for all the songs and poems that are made about it But Don Felipe loves you I have seen men lose their minds over women, and ruin themselves for

women, and kill from jealousy and commit every conceivable folly for women Still, that isn't love It is—well"—she pointed at the excited Adam on my bed—"one thing and another What Felipe did for you these weeks, that is love This Felipe of yours—he is a good man, and I'm speaking as one who knows them inside out "

It is the voice, I thought, and the smile, and what she knows about people and doesn't mind If I had to make confessions I would go to La Rosaura too

"Tell me," I said, "tell me how do I look ? I fainted when I saw myself last "

"Well, I have seen prettier complexions, not to mention that you are much too thin But I'll feed you into shape, I have a good hand at it On my father's ranch my chickens and pigs and heifers were always twice as big as the others I suppose my example made them ambitious Also, I have a secret formula for a paste to make your bosom round and firm As for your skin, Nenita Linda, it will take a small amount of patience on your part But even if you should keep a few little marks—it is not your skin Felipe loves "

Oh yes, it is, I thought, it is my skin It is my whiteness more than anything else "I'd like to look in my mirror," I said fretfully La Rosaura stopped her clowning and studied me silently, in seriousness "Bueno," she said at last "Bueno,, Nenita Linda It is better to walk straight up at the things we fear than to run away from them "

She brought my small hand mirror from my dressing table and held it up for me I don't know how long I looked into it, but it seemed a very long time "Thanks," I said at last

"*Por nada*," said La Rosaura "For nothing" She carried the mirror back to the dressing table, she blew on it and polished it with a towel and put it away "Look at me," she said "A monstrosity An outrage of a female More pockmarks than a nopal has thorns But, I assure you, I never lacked of men who liked me just as I am" She shook her head, as if her memories were flies to be chased away, and there was that deep laugh again, a church bell laughing "I'm a rare spectacle," she said "The soul of a gazelle in the body of a she-elephant Two hundred pockmarks on my face where every man can see them, and not a single one on my behind which unfortunately I can't reveal to the world And yet men have cared for me in my time I'll tell you a secret, Nenita

You must believe yourself that you are beautiful and then men will believe it too ”

It had not been a very bad epidemic, only a minor spell of the smallpox in which not more than a few hundred people had died By the end of the year a great action was under way, a North American benefactor outfitted ships and sent loads of vaccine to New Spain, their arrival was greeted with great formalities and celebrations, with prayers and ringing of bells and the blessings of the high clergy In the cities some enlightened and progressive men as, for instance, the Bishop of Michoacán and the Intendant Riaño of Guanajuato ordered the populace to be vaccinated and to avail themselves of Dr Jenner's miraculous discovery The humble people in the small Indian villages carried the vaccine to the churches and laid it together with fruit and flowers, as another offering, at the feet of their santos And never again occurred such a ravage and dying among the natives as in the past

As for me, I was not exactly pockmarked, neither was my skin what it had been before Loro still called me Blanquita, but Felipe did not We did not journey to Spain and there was no more talk about getting my marriage annulled or of obtaining the Pope's permission for us to become man and wife My religious instruction remained unfinished, a fragment like the Church of Santa Clara at the mine Felipe could still have bought himself the title of a Vizconde de Ramitas, but the wish had lost its urgency and I never heard him mention his father again

Felipe had changed, something had gone slack in him, as if some invisible spring had cracked under too heavy a load As if he had spent too much of himself, first in the drive for his unborn son and then in the fight to keep me alive

“Your peacock is shedding his tail feathers, never mind, Nenita, they always grow again,” said La Rosaura

In the morning a single cloud stuck to the top of the mountain called La Sirena, it was a very small, very compact, very white and bright little cloud It sat there without moving and sunned itself It was so small that you could cover it with four fingers of a hand held before the eye

The sky was almost too blue that morning, a common lapislazuli blue, and the day held a sharp stinging heat The air was dry and yet heavy Most of the cisterns in the town's

patios were empty and the few public fountains had not given water for a week. Here and there an iridescent puddle was stagnating between the stones of the dry river beds, and the light ricocheted in a hard glare from the boulders and rocks. Little boys were digging their dirty toes into the slime, and other little boys hung about the bridges and, with shrill birds' cries, they pointed out something to be scavenged from the conglomerate refuse at the river bottom which the drought had uncovered. Pieces of skin and leather, white shards of a broken China tureen, terra cotta ones of native crockery, smashed bottles and flasks, a rusty horseshoe, the brightness of small bones washed clean as ivory. Also, and as everywhere in Guanaxuato, there was silver in the sands, amethysts among the pebbles, coins pitched into the river by drunk and exuberant miners. Swarms of flies and large gnats stood thickly over this small landscape of refuse, and the stench of rot and decay was overpowering. The shadows under the bridges were black and sharp that morning, as black as the light was hard and bright, and the underside of the arches seemed dead without the pattern of reflected water which at other times trembled and played over the grey stone. But shortly before noon the contrast between light and shade had softened and the cloud on top of La Sirena was changing its shape. All its glare was contracting into one round, luminous core, almost like another sun, with a greyness as of soiled linen surrounding it. The heat was worse than before.

The people looked up at the little cloud, sheltered their eyes, wetted their lips. *Ojala*, said the people of Guanaxuato, *ojala* that it may rain, that the waters may arrive! The smoke from the many small charcoal fires on which the noonday meals were cooking did not rise. It spread out in a fine dark haze which kept floating in the air, and here and there small flakes of soot sailed an almost horizontal course without falling to the ground. The bitter burned smell remained hovering over the roofs, and all at once, as by a signal, the donkeys in the stalls of the Mesón El Refugio began to sound their plaintive, choked cries.

A little later something happened to the colour of the hillside. Ordinarily the tall rigid pillars of the organ cactus and the large flat discs of nopal seemed as if cut of tin and painted a metallic green, but now they stood out for one moment in a tortuous design of sun-yellow and sepia-black and then they quickly

turned grey, as though withering and dying off before one's eyes A patch of laundry strung between two of the eyeless adobe huts had been white, red, indigo, and the rude pink of Mexico a minute ago, now, swiftly and suddenly, all brightness streaked out of it and left only grey rags A huge, brutal bulk of purplish clouds came up over La Sirena, pushing the white little cloud of the morning ahead as a gallant avant-garde The sun was still shining A flock of blackbirds swirled up into the air and dropped noisily down again into the slack branches of the pepper trees The small cloud had reached the sun and wrapped its soiled linen around it Very far off, maybe as far as Santa Rosa, a faint roll of thunder was grumbling, it sounded like an old man muttering a curse under his breath The hills and cerros, always crowding the town, pressed still closer, every fold and wrinkle became so near and clear one could have touched it with an outstretched finger, and a muleteer's shout to his string of animals way up on the old road from San Miguel could be heard distinctly on the Plaza Mayor There was still a pale blue piece of sky on the horizon to the west, but the clouds reached out for it and pushed it out of their way The sun kept on shining behind the clouds and brushed a yellow edge on every grey hill and rock and roof Five pigeons rising from the bell tower of San Diego became sputtering sparks of white fire against the slate-grey sky The clouds did not seem to move and yet had taken possession of the entire firmament The heat was pressing down and the air tasted of burnt weeds and was hard to breathe

At three o'clock, as every day, the church bells pealed and they, too, sounded very close and loud in the curious stillness of the thickening atmosphere Then, abruptly, a wet, cold blast of wind pounced upon the town, striking down perpendicularly, as through a funnel or a chimney It tore a few hats off gentlemen's heads, lifting them in a slow spiral into the air On the plazas and plazuelas it stirred up round, steep whirls of dust, carried them almost as high as the cross on the old tower of the Parroquial Church, and let go of them No second gust followed the first, hats were retrieved and the dust returned and settled slowly on the ground For one moment the trees behind San Diego had shown the silvery underside of their leaves, but now they hung limp once more The people stopped on the streets and looked up into the sky which had been lowered like a stage sky pulled on ropes In a few of the

palaces the shutters were banged shut The stink of the river bed had become almost unbearable

The clouds over La Sirena were almost black now, a purplish black, with a slow, greasy milling and shoving of brighter, smaller clouds, like scales on the belly of a menacing, gigantic, prehistoric reptile The thunder beyond La Valenciana remained distant, not more than a muttering A bluish-white flash of lightning ran down to the crest of La Sirena like a river on a map The thunder followed many seconds later and was not very loud, at the same time it began to rain Some large and very cold raindrops fell into the streets, and the people held out their hands and lifted their faces Gracias a Dios, they said Thank God and all his Saints Rain! At last! Thank the Virgen and our Señor Jesus Cristo, rain! The streets sponged up the moisture, the dust turned darker with the wetness, the cobblestones shone, and the smoke hung in plumes from the flat roofs

After five minutes the rain ended, much too suddenly after the long and great preparations of the day There were lightning and thunder now on various sides and people hastened towards their houses, doors were banged closed, children were pulled into dark doorways, laundry lines hauled down, lids and covers were taken off the cisterns in the patios, and the poor people put out every jar and jug and pot they possessed The air stood motionless and there was a taste of brass and a shine as of brass everywhere The mellow pink of the palaces, the ornate façades and towers of the churches, the grey masonry of walls and bridges, the festering green of the cactus hills, the scarlet geraniums spilling from a blue terrace, and the brown, the copper, the ivory-white faces of the people—it all was suffused by that queer, ghastly brassy light of the oncoming storm Two horses galloped wildly across the Plazuela A jangling, silver-loaded string of mules was driven with hoarse cries, with frantic blows, towards their shelter There was something like panic in the air, and the church bells rang out the fourth hour

Then, with one stroke, the yellow gleam was wiped off the face of the town, night fell upon us, and the storm broke loose

I was sitting in the downstairs studio when the darkness came down, with a noise and uproar as if the world had rushed headlong into another planet and were splintering into dust It was the end, cataclysm and ultimate destruction The walls

were shaking and trembling with a sound as of a thousand cannons fired simultaneously. The thunder crashes were one with the rush and roar of the cloudburst, and the savage fusillade of hail was drowned by the howling rage and assault of the storm. The beams which supported the ceiling were creaking, the house seemed to heave and rise and be moved from its foundations. In the dark, something blew cold and ghastly past my face, it was the expensive Flemish tapestry, billowing out and dropping off the wall, nails and plaster crumbled after it. A lamp swung back and forth above my head and then came crashing down into the pool of broken things around my feet. A splinter hit my cheek, and as I touched it a small runnel of blood stuck to my fingers.

For a moment the raging storm seemed to catch its breath, and then I could hear tormented shrieks, smashing windows, iron falling on to the cobblestones, and a sound as of hammers on the anvils of hell. There was, too, something like music in all the uproar, a counterpoint, as if an enormous organ were playing. These were, I recognized at last, the church bells, but whether they were ringing alarm or whether the storm was tearing at them in their lofty towers, I did not know. Three crashes and flashes of lightning struck so close that I expected the house to go up in flames, after that the darkness grew thinner, the noises separated themselves, and I could recognize some objects here and there.

The windows were broken, the rain stood outside like a solid wall of dark glass, and the Plazuela had become a lake on which black shapes were drifting towards the broad stairs which descended to the Cabildo and the government buildings. Only there were no stairs now but a gushing, swirling, frothing mass of water, tumbling down as over a sluice. In the current I saw the trunk of a tree sweep by, broken beams, a madly struggling mule. And, among tables and chairs and baskets and household goods, something that three times came to the surface and three times tried to gain some hold, somewhere, three times I saw the small hand of the drowning child reach out in vain. I threw myself across the barricade of hail and ice on my window sill and against the confining iron bars of the grille. I stretched out my arms, but they were too short. I grabbed the next best thing, a tall, carved candleholder, but it was too late. The little hand had given up the struggle, and the small dark bundle was swept onward and downward,

caught in a whirl, it turned once around itself and disappeared in the rushing cataract at the end of the Plazuela

In a dry desperation I was sobbing without tears I found myself standing in water up to my knees, and even while I was staring down it rose, rose swiftly and clutched cold and ugly to my thighs It flowed in a steady, gushing stream through the windows, for by now the lake outside had mounted above the level of the floor, above the window sill, and began to fill the room It began to lift the chairs off the tiles, wanted to lift my feet off the ground I climbed up on to the large oaken table, but the water pursued me, soon it would press me against the ceiling, it would keep rising and rising until I was to die a gasping death

I called myself to order then I could swim, couldn't I? I thrust myself upon the water, I dived down to the door handle and fought savagely to open it against the pressure of the flood I shall never know how I succeeded in forcing that door open, because the moment I had done it a wave broke over me, I was lost for an eternity in a blue, purple, orange, roaring, singing, humming void, my head hit hard against something and I found myself clutching to the cross which crowned the wrought-iron work arching over our cistern I shook the water from my eyes and coughed it up from my windpipe and looked around The patio was flooded almost to the second story, all my birds were drowned, their cages slowly floating on the surface, but the rain was abating On top of the stairs leading to the upper gallery Tío Lalo was crouching, he was wrapped in his serape, had his sombrero pushed forward on his head, he had a bundle with his belongings at one side and a bottle of aguardiente at the other, he was smoking and did not appear unduly concerned

"*Holá, Your Grace,*" he called to me "This is the best place in the house If you will kindly tie this around your waist——"

From his bundle he brought out a rope, the indispensable requisite of any working Mexican, tied it into a loop, and threw it across the patio "*Olé!*" he said happily when it landed on the tip of the cross to which I was clutching I held on with one hand while I slipped the rope over my head and pulled it tight around my middle "With your permission," Tío Lalo said with indestructible Mexican politeness as he began hauling me in like a dead fish "*Bienvenida, mi amor,*" said Loro, who was sitting on his perch and with his humped-up

neck and ruffled wet feathers looked like another Mexican wrapped in a serape Tío Lalo held out his bottle, gave me an encouraging grin I took a reluctant sip of the repulsive liquid, I did not get sick from it and my teeth stopped rattling

"Thank you for taking Loro upstairs "

"It is a shame I could not save the other birds I opened their cages to let them fly, but they were afraid of the hurricane "

"Where are the maids ?"

"On the roof—what the storm left of it——"

"The horses, Tío Lalo——"

"Yes, Your Grace The river was in the stable, or the stable in the river, before I could do anything But there will be hundreds of dead horses today "

"I thought the end of the world had come "

"Indeed, Your Grace But it wasn't much of a flood as floods here go Now, the flood of 1780, for instance, that was a veritable flood "

"And La Ramita ? The patrón is out there "

"La Ramita is a good stout mine, Your Grace I shall inform myself as soon as the worst is over "

Shortly after five the rain stopped and by the time of the Rosario the water had receded considerably The sky returned to its normal place above the town, and somewhat later there was an almost boastful sunset Its bright glow was still illuminating the spectacle of the stricken streets when Domingo arrived on horseback with orders from Felipe to inquire about the condition of myself and the house and to return at once to La Ramita with the answer I heard him exchange information in a quiet murmur with Tío Lalo, who had opened the door, they were talking across a pile of clay and sand and debris which blocked the entrance "And how is your master?" I called from my battered balcony Domingo murmured his answer to Tío Lalo, who transmitted it to me

"Occupied "

"And the road ? Is it difficult to get here from the mine ?" More muttering at the house door

"Pues—regular "

"Tío Lalo, tell him that I beg of the patrón to ride home before it gets too dark "

I saw Domingo shrug his shoulders

"The patrón will have to remain at La Ramita tonight.' was informed

"Wait, Domingo," I called, "I shall write a few words to the *patrón*"

I was trying to extract some paper and a crayon from the wreckage of my bedroom, when Tío Lalo appeared with the sombrero in his hand. The light of the slowly and theatrically setting sun came with him through the battered door and glanced off the silver threshold. In all the marigold-yellow the old servant's face seemed grey, with grey stubbles and a grey smile on it.

"May I ask permission to ride with Domingo to La Ramita?"

"Impossible, Tío Lalo. We can't remain in the house without a man. It wouldn't be safe tonight."

"That is so, Your Grace. However, it appears that at the mine there is a need for persons of much experience, the like of which I possess."

When Tío Lalo became formal I knew that he was either drunk or unhappy. "What are you talking about? What happened at the mine? Speak up, man, speak up," I shouted at him.

"There appears to exist a certain gravity of conditions caused by a break-through from the old shaft, the flooded one, San Ysidro," said Tío Lalo. "Considering that various members of my family are working in the mine, as for example one son, Manolo, two nephews, also one grandson, Manolito, I am begging permission to ride out there with Domingo," he said with dignity.

"And Don Felipe?" I cried. "Did anything happen to the master?"

"Not up to the present, Your Grace. But I am begging permission——"

Our horses are dead, I thought. Where shall we get horses? If only the horses had not been lost. It was all I could think. "I am going to the mine myself," I said. "At once. You—yes, I give you permission to go. But we have no horses."

There was still the last glow of the sun upon the roofs as we rode out of town, all three of us on the same horse. I was sitting almost on the neck of the huge chestnut, behind me Domingo holding on with his superb herdsman's knee grip, and Tío Lalo balancing himself somehow on the horse's rump. I hoped that the town would still be too upset to take

notice of the Princess Pontignac sharing a horse with two Indios, one of them fairly inebriated. The balconies were filled with people surveying the havoc and calling congratulations from house to house on their being alive and, by the grace of God, unharmed. In the torn streets, among the piles of debris, the scum of the town was scurrying in great good spirits in the hope of wresting loot and gain from disorder and destruction. In the poorer districts the narrow lanes were still swift mountain streams, the flood had crushed the loosely built adobe huts, and, coming round a corner, one suddenly beheld a jagged community of ruins which did not look like the result of one hour's tempest but as though it had taken a thousand years to annihilate them like that. The air was filled with rumours of losses and miraculous salvations, with cries and shrieks, with muttered prayers, and here and there we passed the mute grief of a group staring down on a dead child, or, indeed, a dead pig. We left the Cerro del Cuarto behind, the sun was setting beyond the rim of the mountains and the evening spread out over the land like purple ink. There was a cool drift of air, and the scent of shrub and herb grew stronger as we gained the next rise and turned into the narrow road towards La Ramita.

Small campfires were scattered over the slope, the silhouettes of people moving black against the glow, or the reflection of it bright on their hands and faces and serapes. All these people were completely and strangely quiet. No sound but the breaking of a twig, the hiss of embers bursting into a spray of red sparks. Beyond this silence, in which the people moved with a dreamlike slowness, there was, on another level of reality, a distant, deep, strained panting. "The wheels, the hoists, the pumps," Tio Lalo said softly, derisively. "What a complication of new machinery!"

A breathless tension hung over the scene, as of a soldiers' camp the night before the great battle. And, as in a soldiers' camp, there were women to cook their men's food, tortilla and steaming atole, women to hollow a home out of the night and of the gravity of the disaster. I saw children, too, not only the sleeping infants tied to their mothers' hips or breasts, but many thin, small boys who looked as if they had never eaten a sound meal in all their lives. They were crouching quietly before the fires and staring with their too large, too sunken, too old eyes into the glow.

As Domingo tied the horse to a low stone wall which loomed out of the dark, from somewhere behind that wall I heard Felipe's mare neigh a welcome to her gelding friend My head felt light and empty as I stumbled over the uneven ground, my heart was clenched like a fist "Where shall I find the *patrón*?" I asked Tío Lalo held his hand out to lead me up several steps Domingo had bent down, torn some dry branches from a shrub, he dipped them into one of the small fires until they began to gleam, and with this torch, walking backward in front of me, he showed me the way

I stood then on the wide rise of steps which were to have swept up grandly to the portal of the planned and abandoned Church of Santa Clara But soon the steps lost themselves in the rain-mulched ground, there was no portal, and as much as had been constructed of the church looked like the venerable ruin of a cathedral destroyed centuries ago Hardly a year had passed since Felipe had interrupted the building of this church —only temporarily, he had told himself—but in this brief time a festering growth of cactus and nopal had broken through the stone floor of the nave A tenacious pepper tree was hanging its feathery branches from a crack in the unfinished wall, and above the roofless arches the dark sky was stretching into the nowhere Owls had built their nests in the deserted masonry and, stirred up by the torchlight, they were looking out with round, red eyes or taking flight on soft, nocturnal wings

It was in that church, turned into a ruin before it had ever been built, that I saw the first men killed in the disaster They were neatly and stiffly laid out in the apse, where the high altar was to have stood within the parclose of fine silver and under a high, painted, gilded dome All the gold and silver were to have come out of Felipe's deep, deep shaft But what had come out of there were the motionless bodies of men with the bluish dark faces and the tortured expressions of the drowned There were not very many of them, twelve in all, they had muscles like ropes, no flesh over their ribs, they were stripped to the waist, water was dripping from their short leather pants, and each one wore some scapulary or holy medal around his neck A short, fat little priest walked between them and sprinkled holy water on them and prayed silently over them, and a second priest in his wake tried to lift their stiffening arms and loosen their fingers and make their

years of the reign of Charles II saw a fierce struggle between cruelty on the one side and fanaticism on the other. The extreme Presbyterians, led by Richard Cameron, asserted that the King had forfeited his right to the throne by his repudiation of the Solemn League and Covenant, and a public declaration to this effect, made at Sanquhar in the summer of 1680, led to severe reprisals on the part of the Government. These are the years known in Scottish history as the "Killing Time." When the Duke of York became King James VII, Parliament made mere attendance at a conventicle a capital offence, until the King's policy changed and Declarations of Indulgence were issued.

The fall of King James in the end of the year 1688 was followed by a reversal of the Restoration policy. William and Mary were offered the Crown of Scotland on condition (among other stipulations) that the Episcopal Church should be disestablished, and, though William was prepared to disregard his promise, he ultimately found it to be in his interest to keep it. The re-establishment of Presbytery by the Scottish Parliament in 1690 was no victory for the supporters of the Solemn League and Covenant, but the history of the Church in the next half century shows the hold which the principles of the Solemn

League still retained on the affections of a large number of Presbyterians Except for the recognition of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Presbyterianism which was restored by the Revolution Settlement was the Presbyterianism of 1592 The Scots received from William—what Cromwell had said they ought to have—liberty of conscience, not liberty to bind other men's consciences. Presbytery was not imposed on the nation, though the connection of Scottish Episcopacy with Scottish Jacobitism led to much suffering for the disestablished Church The extreme Presbyterians, followers of Richard Cameron, declined to join the Established Church Their three ministers deserted them, but the Cameronians continued to meet in their Fellowship Societies, and, possessing no ordained minister, were deprived of participation in the sacraments of the Church In 1706 the "Society" men were joined by a minister of the Church of Scotland, who had left it as a protest against the neglect of the Covenants and the toleration of Episcopal clergy who took the oath of allegiance to the new sovereigns The sinfulness of toleration was also a leading cause of the first secession from the Church in 1788. These Original Seceders did not unite with the Reformed Presbyterians, as the Camer-

hands fold over the scapularies on their hard, emaciated miners' chests before rigor mortis could set in

Tío Lalo went ahead of me, studying very closely and attentively every one of the dead faces I saw him kneel down before the priest and ask something The priest shook his head and pointed with his chin out and up into the dark, and Tío Lalo came back to me

"The Señor Curate says the patrón is with his men in the mine I do not advise Your Grace to enter there A woman in a mine means bad luck any time "

"What more bad luck is there left yet ?" I said bitterly "Domingo," I said, "show me to your master "

We left the place of sorrow behind, walked over the crest of the hill, and descended on a path broadened and smoothened by the feet of hundreds of miners and mules going to work in La Ramita This hill, then, with its growth of shrub and thorn, was Felipe's empire This ground was like wormwood, beneath our feet the earth had been eaten away by the inroads of shafts and tunnels, galleries and raises and pits, down there in darkness and danger and daily sweat the little miner-worms lived and worked and perished and died But the structures aboveground were powerful, strong, of a trumping, challenging grandeur We approached a cave of light, the entrance to the mine lit by two huge oil lanterns, we passed through a ring of silently waiting people, walked through a tall gate flanked by two buttressed watch towers, and entered the vast patio

I could not see the end of the yard because the many torches and candles illuminating the scene were blinding me The place was so densely filled with people, with voices and commands, with ropes and cables, with creaking wheels driven by water and wheels driven by mules, there was so much of a desperate tension and a constant, purposeful motion, that I could not absorb any details For some reason I had expected that I would find Felipe at once, I had pictured him isolated from the rest, giving commands like a general who overlooks the battle from a vantage point But in the pressing and milling of people who did not give me as much as a glance I felt lost I had rushed to the mine against Felipe's strict orders, because if there was a calamity I belonged at his side But every one of these sweating, panting, half-naked, half-human miners was of more use here than I with all my love They knew what to do and I did not

Some of them were hitching a team of mules to a thill which seemed to be driving a large wheel from whose creaking, squeaking hub ropes were stretching away into the gaping mouth of a tunnel. Others were coming from there with mules, and a single high shrieking cry arose as still other men unloaded what had been brought above ground on the backs of these animals more dead, more of the wet, dripping, earth-covered, black-faced drowned miners. I was swept towards those bodies in the wild onrush of the women who had been waiting without motion somewhere in the background. The single high shriek pierced the air like a rasping file, it sounded like the unending noise of a summer meadow full of crickets, only a thousand times shriller the shriek of a mother who had found her son among the victims. Her mouth stood open, a black hole in the contorted face, her eyes were shut tightly and not a tear came from them. She tore her son away from the men who were lowering the limp bundle from the back of the mule, she took him in her arms and cradled him and swayed him up and down as if he were a babe to be put to sleep. The men pleaded with her to let go, they wanted to put him down on a mat, they wanted to try to save him, perhaps there was still life and breath in him, but the woman had gone insane. Shrieking, she carried her child off, running out into the night with the black bundle in her arms, her voice high and shrill and never quite fading away. I had seen that son, and he was only a boy, thin and small and covered with mud, mud running out of the corner of his mouth, and his eyes large and serious and wide open.

I had lost sight of both Domingo and Tío Lalo and went on alone to search for Felipe, and thus I stepped into the core of disaster. This, then, was the shaft Santa Clara that had been driven a foolhardy, wanton, defiant nineteen hundred feet into the earth. It looked like a cistern a hundred times magnified, a web of white mist hovered over it and covered the blackness of its immense fall. A great hollow roar lay down there in the depth, voice of the waters which had broken through from the higher level of the flooded San Ysidro. In the mist there was the shadowy movement of incomprehensible machinery, ropes, pulleys, windlasses, hoists, gusts of steam, and men, men, men. All of them black with sweat and mud, all of them breathing hard and with difficulty. Some were working, looking deader than the dead ones. Some were kneeling over

their comrades, kneading their limbs, rubbing their sweaty backs Some were drinking from wineskins which made the rounds or from big-bellied jugs Some were splashing their arms and shoulders with water from a barrel, some were sluicing the water over their friends from the leather bags in which ordinarily the ore was brought up from the pit A table with a burning candle was standing near the collar of the shaft and a young Mestizo was reading an endless litany of names from a list I searched for Felipe and could not find him I asked the men and they gave no answer I asked the Mestizo who was reading the names of the missing miners and he only stared at me as if I were an apparition

“Where is the *patrón*?” I kept asking “Can no one tell me where the *patrón* is? I must find the *patrón*” The Mestizo did not interrupt his litany, but at last he pointed with his thumb towards the shaft and then over his shoulder towards the entrance of a tunnel Venturing deeper into the ground, I found that one branch of it spiralled down gradually, as a ramp for mule and man Small groups of miners were marched in by a foreman, they had burning candles in their hands and they were singing a deep-voiced slow hymn or prayer that could be heard, farther and farther away, long after the little candle flames had disappeared But where a hole had been blasted into the side of this gallery, another way was hewn into the rock, a deep, black, precipitous, narrow shaft, a well of peril and darkness, almost perpendicular, with ladders loosely fastened together with leather bands and held to the walls by crude iron brackets It seemed utterly improbable that men could climb up or down these ladders which were no ladders at all but only tree trunks with some precarious footholds adzed into their wood and the abyss falling dizzily away and away beneath them Yet I had heard through Tío Lalo of these raises, where not only men carried up the leather sacks with loads of a hundred and two hundred pounds of ore, but where eight-year-old boys were initiated into the hardships of their profession with twenty-five pounds on their thin brown backs

“Where is the *patrón*?” I kept asking, but none of the miners could give me an answer “Where, where is the *patrón*?”

At last, a few men came up on those improbable, unbelievable ladders, each one clamping himself with a hooked iron staff from step to step and each one with a child tied to his

back There was a roar of voices as they were pulled up and out, and then they were lying on the ground, fighting for air like dying fish They looked hardly human, covered with mud and earth and sweat and filth as they were Their hair was a mass of black mud and they spat mud from their black lips Some of them were hurt and even the blood of their injuries was a thick greyish-black smear, and it was strange to think how much of this grey-black filth was silver They were lying there, their ribs pumping, the air wheezing in and out of their throats, their closed eyelids the only lighter patches in their faces

One of these men was Felipe

He had gone down with six volunteers to save a group of boys, the young, small buques, who had been trapped in the shaft, below the break but above the flooded pit, and they had brought them up, seven boys condemned to die, and every one of them alive "Olé," said the miners as they unfastened the children and laid them out in a row "Olé," as if they were at a good, fine, exciting bullfight

"Do they live?" Felipe asked with his first breath Yes, he was told, they live, by a miracle of the Virgen, they live, the little rascals, they live! Felipe tried to sit up but fell back with exhaustion "There are twelve more down there," he said He rubbed his bleeding knuckles against his bare, sweating chest, his scapulary looked like another clod of wet earth "Domingo?" he said "Where's that scoundrel Domingo?"

Domingo was there, as always "Wine—" wheezed Felipe "Water Not much time I have to go back"

Domingo came with a bottle and Felipe sat up, resting himself on his elbow "Felipe," I said, kneeling at his side "I am here Let me help you Let me wash you"

He stared at me for a little while, and when he comprehended my presence he began to grin, a white grin in his black face "Thou art crazy, woman," he said "Go, go away, *vete, mujer* I was worried about you Well—*salud!*"

I laughed a little then I watched the wine go down his throat in great gulps My own throat was nothing but sand and sawdust "You? Worried about me? But I am not to worry about you!"

"No Never," he said, also laughing "Never about me Hand me that bucket, pour it on my back, Domingo So, that is better Much better Now I am a new man, and that new man will go down again"

"Must you?"

"Do you think I am doing it for the sport of it? If I don't go down, not one of these lazy, slothful animals will go. Not to save their own child will they go. You don't know these Mexicans as I do."

The water stood in beads on the oily, smeary mud that covered his skin, here and there a small patch had washed clean, pale as the skin of the saints on a Spanish painting "Which one did I carry up?" he asked. The men who were washing and rubbing the half-dead little boys did not know Felipe kneeled down among the thin small bodies and smiled at all of them. He lifted the arm of one and felt the pulse in the thin wrist, he pulled up the eyelids of another, he bent down and listened to the heartbeat of a third one. "What a crop," he said, still smiling, "what a flock of starved chickens I've caught me here, not five reales' worth of flesh on all of them together. Well, take them to their mothers, and let's go for the next load."

There was, in the way he touched the children and joked about them, the same tenderness he had shown me during my illness, not a soft tenderness, but the good, hard, manly one. It was there in him, deep down, buried, silted, covered up by the debris of life, but there, always Man, I thought, what a man you are, man, my man, my Felipe.

He went down again with three volunteers whom he persuaded to make the perilous trip with him. Of the four children he and his helpers brought up, two were dead, and the men muttered that there was no sense in risking one's life to carry out dead buques. Felipe went down, alone this time. Eight mules came up the spiral way with another cargo of bodies. One of the men had still some life in him and gasped a report about twenty-four miners who were cut off on the middle level in a gallery they called La Culebra, the snake.

All activity seemed to shrink back into the tunnel and I drifted with the crowd, the air grew thick and evil-smelling and the rock-hewn walls pressed close and low. I brushed against the roughness, it was wet, sweating out a warm liquid, warm as snakes are warm to the touch. A few smouldering torches, stuck in iron rings to the rocks, were leading to a small bright cave where many candles were burning before an image of the Virgen, the one called La Purisima. Women were kneeling before her, and there was the monotonous hum of an ever-

repeated Ave Maria They had given themselves up to the hypnotizing, pain-stilling, thought-killing, rest-inducing, healing magic of repetition, an ever-repeated prayer, an ever-repeated cradle song, an ever-repeated line from a poem they have the same sedative power to empty the brain of thought, anxiety, and consciousness If ever I had needed praying I needed it now, but I was incapable of speaking to this doll-like image The Virgen was made of wax, nicely dressed in blue velvet, and she was wearing a preposterously blonde wig I had never seen a blonde Virgen in this country of dark women and I blushed If Felipe had presented his devout miners with this image, he had committed a severe indiscretion by making her a guera, a blonde one, like myself

Well, tonight La Purísima is not doing her duty, I thought grimly as I was trying to get away from the tight little nook of idolatry and humble trust There were a few wilting flowers at the feet of the waxen blonde and also some humble but practical gifts of vegetables Two red tomatoes, some squash, three ears of corn, just as I reached the fringe of the circle I saw a woman put down a large speckled turkey egg and cross herself And, taking up my vigil at the raise, I envied her for her faith and felt rebellious against the deity who was deaf to it

"Are you still here? Why don't you go home, mujer? I have no use for you here," Felipe panted as he came up with two small, limp buques on his back There is no home, I thought to myself There is no roof and there is no bed and no sleep nor peace But I only said "As you wish, Felipe"

"You are a public danger here among all the men," he said "You are more beautiful than is permissible," he said, half dead as he was, but with the merciless gallantry of a real Spaniard He gave me his exhausted grin and went down once more And this time he did not come up again

There arose then a great confusion and much shouting and quarrelling and a complete loss of order and discipline Many of the men had begun to be drunk, and others had fallen asleep with fatigue Some had gone home, and others were making a little fiesta of it, keeping company with their friends and with the women around the nice small campfires outside Some said that one ought to go down in the shaft and save the patrón And others said let him die down there, let him croak, let him see how it is down there in the pit, the patrón! The Spaniard, they muttered, the Blanco, the damned Gachupín, that he may

die That they all may die, the Blancos, the Gachupines I heard it as through a wall, everything was muffled by my anxiety and my fatigue It was the first time that I heard this murmur of the Mexicans, the Indios, the men of mixed blood and dark skin Que mueran los Gachupines ! That they may die, the white ones, the hated ones

Others, the drunk ones, the excited ones, turned their wrath now against that worthless one, that fraud of an image, that Virgen who had not worked one of the miracles she was supposed to perform Let us throw her down into the pit, they said, let her feel on her own body how it is to drown down there And then let us see if she won't do something to bring up our comrades, and the patrón, too, if she pleases Felipe was still down there and Domingo gave no answer when I talked to him and I could not find Tfo Lalo and neither could I go down myself Two of the foremen had been in the other shaft, in San Ysidro, where all the disaster had started, and they had established some connection with the twenty-four men buried in La Culebra The men had answered by knocking, but the foremen did not know how to reach them and save them, and there was more quarrelling and more confusion And then the muffled sounds in the depth of Santa Clara changed, and the men grew quiet and listened Then it came back, stronger than before, and then there was a roll as of thunder somewhere in the undermined, worm-eaten innards of the earth, another moment of frightful silence and then a rush, a panic, a trampling, stamping, mad stampede towards the tall gate which led to the outside

And there the crowd was held and blocked by a barrier of men on horseback A voice gave commands, there was a slackening, a muttering, a calming down, and then a surging back into the patio I had been thrown to the ground in the first rush and did not quite understand what happened I only knew that I did not want to be swept out of the mine as long as Felipe was down there I thought in confusion that perhaps some troops had been summoned by the worried foremen I picked myself up and there came that rumbling again, weaker than before, and the ground trembled "Cuidado !" someone shouted in Spanish, and then in German "Vorsicht ! Careful !"

One of the supporting beams overhead had given way and some large rocks had been loosened and would have hit me but

for Bert Quaile's presence of mind He had pulled me up and out of danger and now he held me tight to him, he smelt of tobacco and sweat and his long arms crushed me like those of a bear and his chest was hairy like that of a beast, and the whole enormous bulk of man and strength and unexpected relief was trembling as if he were afraid, for me or of me He had lifted me off my feet, but now he lowered me gently and said "Are you all right, ma'am ? I hope I didn't hurt you "

When the news of the disaster at La Ramita had reached the amalgamation plant where Quaile was now working, he had assembled some machinery, horses, men, and had made his plan and rushed to bring succour as quickly as he could His was the voice of authority, and the men listened to him and obeyed No one knew this mine as he did, and he explained to them what had to be done, where the ground was settling, where the danger lay, and where the safety His crew was fresh and some of the men of La Ramita scraped up their pride and would not stay behind I did not understand all the actions which he organized, but it was as if all of a sudden a hundred small wheels were beginning to turn and to grip into each other, systematically and with purpose, every single man a necessary, well-functioning part of the whole Quaile himself was hoisted down the Santa Clara in a quickly constructed box which he called a bucket and he came up with Felipe and the last of the little boys, all of them apparently dead, but all of them alive The pumps were working louder and faster, and there was a call for volunteers to blast a way to the men cut off in La Culebra Quaile called them up by their names "How does it go, Fernando ?" "You will not disappoint me, Pedro Salazar, a man of your courage will not let his comrade die, and you, Mariano de Talavera, the best man with a fuse I knew in all my life—"

I saw Tfo Lalo among the small group of men who were marching off to attend to the desperately dangerous task He was a bit drunk and terribly proud and he tried to march very erect and like a young one On his shoulders he carried a small keg with black powder for blasting, and as he brushed past me he smiled widely and said "With your permission, Your Grace It appears a person of my experience is needed for getting Manolo and Manolito out of the trap "

"Hasta luego, Tfo Lalo," I said "Until soon May you go with God " At the mouth of the tunnel the fat little priest

stood and blessed the men as they passed, and that was the last I saw of Tio Lalo

Such was the end of La Ramita and of Felipe's deep shaft and of his luck and of his brief bonanza. One hundred and twenty-three men were lost in the disaster, thirty-eight of them were never accounted for, they had to be left in the black waters buried at a depth of nineteen hundred feet. There was a joke making the rounds among the miners that these men were not dead but that they kept on digging just a little deeper and thus would emerge from the shaft at the other side of the world, somewhere in China.

For miners are hard men and it is better for them to make a cruel joke than to grow maudlin about the hazards of their work. The bodies of the others were buried in the remnants of the Church of Santa Clara, and on All Souls' Day their women-folk would beat a track through the quickly growing thorn and shrub and bring flowers and light candles over the neglected graves. La Ramita had to be given up, the work abandoned, the tall gate in the boastful citadel walled up, in the depths beams and ropes were rotting away, tunnels and galleries caved in, broke down, destroyed themselves, and the black waters closed over the silver vein.

It was kind of Bert Quaile not to say I warned you. All he said was "I am starting an amalgamation mill of my own, and if you want to work there, Don Felipe, you are very welcome. Any time, Don Felipe. Also, if you should need some credit to open another claim—I am not a rich man, but I might be able to help you."

But Felipe, white as a chalked wall and as rigid as though he had swallowed his own dress sword, answered "Thank you for the generous offer and the good intention, Don Roberto. But I prefer to preserve my independence, however, as soon as I reopen La Ramita I shall be glad to let you amalgamate some of my ore for me, Don Roberto."

PART THREE



DOWN, down, down

How is it, when a proud stubborn man goes down in a decline, steeper and deeper and darker than any shaft he ever dreamed up in his most defiant dreams?

Such a man will keep himself more erect and his gait will assume a pointed haughtiness and his whole countenance will be a kind to make him appear taller than before, while at the same time he will lose weight and hollow out. He will dress somewhat too elegantly for any one occasion and he will become punctilious in all matters of appearance and manners, he will be irritable about ridiculous details, he will slap his servant, Domingo, on account of a missing button or a poorly polished saddle, and he will angrily lash out at his woman when he suspects that she does not show him sufficient respect or that she is smiling about him or that she too readily accepted the compliments of his friend, Andreas Ruiz. He will make a point of being seen at all official gatherings and wherever the gilded youth assembles. He will parade his horse under the balconies for other gay bloods and their ladies to admire. To the beggars he will give higher alms than even the Conde de Valenciana, and whenever donations are solicited for a church, for the Colegio, for the insatiable Virrey, or as another gift to be sent to the worthless King of Spain, he will make contributions not only much too high for his purse but a bit too ostentatious altogether. He will lay steep bets at the cockfights and gamble for high stakes, and he will do so with the poor luck of those who have lost confidence in themselves. He will put more and more weight and importance upon matters of prestige and pay for it with constant deprivations in those compartments of his life which are not seen publicly. He will be very gay and a trifle too loud and he will tell a hundred funny and adventurous stories, and in his sleep he will moan, and once or twice his woman, studying his face in the light of dawn, will find his long childish lashes moist, as though he had cried in his dreams.

He announced loudly that he was disgusted with the havoc the flood had worked at the Palacio Contreras and sold it to an upstart of the worst sort. With the money received he paid off what he still owed on the palacio, bought a share in a new mine (which, however, turned out to be a total failure), made one of his flashy contributions to some charity, and rented another house.

We still lived in the select part of the town, although on the periphery of it, the house still had a balcony of some sort, and the lantern over our door was of a very simple make. The door was pleasantly carved but not studded, and it would have been much too small to let a horse and rider enter. This was just as well, as the house had no stables and Felipe's horse had to be boarded at the Mesón El Refugio alongside of plebeian mules and donkeys. As for me, I had given up riding as a luxury. I had no horse, no coach, no litter, no burdensome lackeys in flashy livery, no dueña to watch and envy me, no personal maid to comb my hair and steal my best nightgown. But I still had my wicked bed with the naughty paintings, I had Loro, I had a few true friends—Don Lorenzo de Lara, Bert Quaile, La Rosaura. I had my place and my purpose and my duties. And I still had Felipe. All of him.

I think I was quite happy during that first year after the flood and disaster. I saw much more of Felipe than during the hectic times of the bonanza, and he seemed to have more need of me than ever before. We were treated very well by the town during that first year of Felipe's decline, for all these mine owners knew only too well the erratic ups and downs in their enterprises and they had a queer respect for a man who could lose as much and lose as well as this man Contreras. If some of them thought or said that it served him right and that only a madman would challenge God and the elements by sinking a shaft nineteen hundred feet deep, they took care to save his pride and to conceal their sneers. There were offers for Felipe to enter the royal troops as an officer. But the soldiers of Mexico were a sore rabble, the scum of the country pressed into service. Criminals pulled from the jails and put into the uniforms which more and more resembled those of the hated Napoleon Bonaparte's army, thieves caught red-handed and given amnesty, Indians of an ignorance beyond belief and with a complete lack of discipline. And Felipe, who was still occasionally talking about returning to Spain and fighting for

his unhappy country, declined the well-meant suggestion in horrified disgust. Even more offended he felt by Andreas Ruiz's efforts to secure for him the position of a second secretary to the highest Spanish official of the province, the Intendant Riano. With the over-sensitivity of a man in bad luck, he suddenly felt that this post was offered to him as a sop, and he grew angry and insulted. "Thanks," he would say. "Many thanks. But I am used to handing out charity, not accepting it. And I simply loathe ink-stained fingers."

During the second year he sold the large ruby from his ring and replaced it with a piece of red glass and made himself believe that no one noticed the difference. He still dressed impeccably when he went out, but at home he neglected himself more and more as a strange and dangerous lassitude took possession of him.

"Who cares?" he would say. "What's the use? Who, in the name of Christ, cares?"

"I do, I care very much," I would plead. "I care how you look, I want to be proud of you, I don't want you to slouch around the house like a sick old man, and I don't want you to forget that Bert Quaile is sending you two señores who are eager to discuss some project with you which Quaile thinks has very hopeful aspects."

"Leave me in peace with Roberto's projects and aspects," Felipe would say disgustedly. "His enormous projects of a value of fully five clacos!" (A claco was what Felipe gave the beggars at the church door.) "His señores with their mines the size of a fleabite! He seems to forget that I am still the owner of La Ramita, your friend Roberto!"

But in the end he would get out of bed, shave, dress, listen to the miners Quaile had sent him, he would probably borrow some money, invest it in the small mine, and come out with a moderate profit, which, however, he lost quickly in the next enterprise. During that year there was a constant coming and going of prospectors in the house. Some sleek and overdressed like Felipe himself, others rugged and still wearing the rags in which they had set out on their search in the mountains and full of enthusiasm for the ore they claimed to have discovered. There was not one of these men who did not believe—or tried to make Felipe believe—that he had found the Veta Madre. Out of their pockets, from leather bags tied round their necks, from secret recesses in the money belts worn on their naked

bodies, they would pull the small, grey, greasy-looking lumps of ore which I came to know so well. They would put them on their calloused palms and blow on to them to make them sparkle. There was much telling of tall tales, much lying, and occasionally a small amount of truth. There was much rushing to the alchemistic cubicle of a shifty old assayer who could be trusted not to give the enormous secret of the new discovery away. There were hopes as high as the sky and disappointments as crushing as a hailstorm destroying a whole summer's crop. There was, once more, the glitter and fever in Felipe's eyes which I preferred to the pessimistic apathy into which he had fallen for a time.

But while he was still a gambler, he was not a winner any longer, and after a while we had to give up our small but still patrician house and move to the very fringe of respectability at the foot of the Cerro del Cuarto. At the back the hovels of the miners were crawling up the slope in a conglomeration of flat-roofed, windowless grey adobe. Below we looked toward the hospital the Brothers of Belen maintained there for the benefit of sick and maimed miners, and the bells of their small church had replaced for me the more fashionable and sonorous ones of San Diego. But to the west there was a symphony of loud, healthy, impetuous noises. There the imposing structure of the new granary, the Alhóndiga, which the people had nicknamed Granaditas, was approaching its completion. By now this new building, the joy and pride of the Intendant Riaño, had entirely given up looking like a granary. With its arcaded large patio, sweep of stairs, high-ceilinged rooms, it was a castle, a temple, a citadel, and sometimes when the dust was lit up by the sinking sun it lost its challenging square heaviness and became a vision of sheer beauty. On Sundays the townspeople would come out and stare at it and watch its progress. They were proud of it, although there were some who muttered that the Intendant had used for its construction the money appropriated to relieve the constant scarcity of water, and that we did not need a veritable palace to store grain in. I liked to sit on my flat roof and watch the artisans who were chiselling some fine designs of Tuscan style into the pillars of the second story, and let my eyes wander over the geometrical pattern of the yet roofless rooms. There was much to be seen from the roof of our modest home, for it overlooked the junction of the two small rivers and the bridge.

across which all the traffic from and to the mines was flowing. The life on the road down there, the sun on the shining cobblestones, the flowers, the towers, the trees, the animals, the people! The men in their leather gear. The drunk miners of a Saturday afternoon leaning on each other for friendly support, the burros, mules, the dashing young men in their tight silver-buttoned jackets and trousers showing off their horses. The soldiers on horseback, escorting transports of silver bars, and looking very martial with their high shakos and the leather band over their chins. And farther down the road the inns and posadas and mesones, as if taken from the book by Miguel Cervantes in my father's library, the grunting pigs asleep in the doorway for the traveller to step across, the slant of sun in the patio, the saddles hanging from the door, and inside a song, a fight, an old woman's scolding voice, a man's blasphemous cursing, the smells, the sounds, the sights of that road from and to the world's richest mines, oh for the life on that road of sweat and silver, oh for that never-forgotten, ugly, smelly, dirty, wonderful rich life.

Yonder, above the road, hung the friendly, blue-pillared terrace of La Rosaura's. During the day it was the quietest house of them all, but at night it lit up with three fine copper lanterns, and music and laughter wafted sometimes down into the room where I could not sleep because Felipe was up there. It was understood that even in our reduced circumstances I might never set foot in that house on the hill. But La Rosaura came often to visit me, more and more often in the same measure as Felipe began to spend more and more nights in her place. Smartly carrying the ebony cane with Coco's grinning face in her hand, more for fashion's sake than for support, she came striding down the hill, a monument of blooming flesh but with the light step and fine carriage of a healthy young country girl. Never did she enter our little house without a smile, a gift, and a joke "I was lonesome for you, Nenita Linda," she would say "You've become a habit of mine worse than smoking or drinking. If I can't have a portion of you by noon every day I get as restless as a dancing mouse on a wheel." This was said out of sheer kindness, out of that quality Goethe had called the Politeness of the Heart. For without a doubt the lonesome one, the restless one, was I "Lord in high heaven," she would say "But how beautiful you look today, child! I wish I were a man—but then, if I were a man I would have to hang myself."

from the rafters, because you are too damnably faithful to your blessed Felipe Come, let me put a bit of rouge on your cheeks, child—and here, I brought you this little end of lace, I have no use for it, I assure you How do you think a wisp of lace would look on my enormity of a bosom ?”

“Thanks, Rosaura, and thanks again There’s not a day when I don’t have to thank you for something ”

“*Por nada*,” she would always say “For nothing ”

She brought me fruit and fowl, flowers and remedies, cuttings of the red geraniums from her terrace, a basket of large fresh turkey eggs, a bottle of wine, a recipe for a particular Spanish dish Felipe had mentioned, and she gave me freely of her store of wisdom

“Your Felipe—he beats you ? He fights with you ? That’s good That’s a good sign, the best sign you may want Men are funnier than monkeys , I like men, but it is my belief that God made man because he wanted to fashion a creature he could laugh about , to take a man seriously is a heartbreaking mistake I am speaking about men, child Love—that’s something else Love is the most serious thing there is—and the rarest You do love your Felipe, you still love him, don’t you ? And he ? Yes, I am certain he loves you as much as ever, in spite of everything . ” she would say, and, staring at me and through me and beyond me, she would lose her smile and her large face would become like the tragic mask on the theatre curtain in Weimar

“Why do you take so much trouble to make me hold Felipe’s love ?” I asked her once “What is it to you ? What am I to you ? And what is he, except a client of your house ?”

“Ah, child, but you don’t understand I’ve seen so much whoring and done so much of it myself in my day I’ll have a difficult time with San Pedro when I’ll ask him to admit me into heaven ‘You obscene mountain of fat,’ he will say to me, ‘you spreader of disease, you vendor of cardinal sin, you useless, childless blight of men, and is there nothing you have to say for yourself ?’ And then I shall answer him, ‘Dear Señor San Pedro, gatekeeper of heaven,’ I shall answer him, ‘indeed I have done one good deed For all my being a whore and for all my personal rottenness, I was still able to recognize true love when I saw it and I did whatever was in my power to save and shelter it And, being a whore as you rightly call me, I was probably better equipped to watch and guard it than any of

your immaculate, sexless, insipid, and totally inexperienced angels could have done, amen' And then maybe San Pedro will let me enter "

I tried to size up and comprehend the blasphemous irony in Rosaura's eyes "Do you believe in hell and heaven ? Are you religious, Rosaura ?" I asked her "Or is it all a joke to you, just as you think all men a laughing matter ?"

"What do you call religious ? What do you call religion ? And who am I to believe or not to believe ? In my profession, child, it takes a heart of cast iron to keep one's faith and to believe in miracles, in the Immaculate Conception and in the divine grace Did I ever speak to you of the one man in my life I loved, truly and greatly, as you love this Felipe of yours ? He was so thin you could see the daylight shine through him, such small bones, such red hair , you could not help laughing when you saw that red hair of his , you thought you must burn your fingers when you touched it He was a foreigner who had come to Sonora from very far—Scotland, he called his country Well, then, this man of mine with the funny hair, he was a heretic of a great seriousness and he converted me to his having no religion, as other girls are persuaded to take the veil " She began to laugh deep down in her throat "Maybe that is why I became the opposite of a nun, Nenita As for Tomás, he shot himself through the head before he was thirty , he had fallen ill of a cancer which was not only incurable but of such an insupportable painfulness that he preferred to make an end of himself But having been weakened by the sickness and suffering, his aim was poor and he shot off half of his face and still lived on four more days with what was left For four days and nights he moaned and gasped and whistled through a hole in his throat and spit bubbles of blood and screamed, but only very feebly, and no one could have understood what he said but I 'O God, let me die,' was what he said 'O Lord, I beseech Thee, let me die O God, forgive me and let me die O Lord, O Lord, let me die ' As dying goes, it was not much of a recommendation for heresy "

She picked up my hand, examined it carefully, and put it down again "Do you know how to load a pistol and shoot it, Nenita ?" she asked me "No ? Well, remind me to show you how it is done It is one thing every man and woman ought to know I had learned it from Tomás On the fourth day, just after the bells had rung the Angelus, I loaded the pistol and

shot him through the heart And to this day I do not know whether God used me as His tool or whether I did it against His will and spoiled the punishment He had meted out to my love And therefore, Nenita, do not ask me about religion Ask the priests, it is their business and they get well paid for it ”

“And afterwards ? After you had helped Tomás out of his pain ? Did you feel a relief ? Did you feel that you had done right ? Would not that be the answer ?”

“There is no answer, child There is no answer before the moment of our death, and perhaps there is no answer even then As for me, I left the mining camp in considerable haste, as you may imagine, and ended up in New Orleans where I subsequently made a spectacular career in the cabaret of *Les Trois Éléphants* I was still slender then and a good dancer, and I was supported in great style by a very colourful character, a gambler whom they called Coco la Rotule d’Or, because he had been shot in his left leg and the surgeon had made him a knee of gold This cane was one of his gifts , you can see the diamonds are of a very clear water Coco was a passionate dancer and he also liked to execute all sorts of French acrobatics in bed, in spite of his stiff knee——” Rosaura stopped and, feeling my surprised glance on her large, merry face, she added “It is like crossing a bridge, you cross the bridge, you are on the other side of the river It is simple After that with Tomás there was nothing left for me but to be gay I hope, child, you’ll never have to cross that bridge ”

“If you are so preoccupied with my well-being, why don’t you send Felipe home in time ?” I said bitterly “You know that I am waiting for him four nights out of five while he is diverting himself in your house He has not the money to spend and it is bad for him ”

“In that you are mistaken, Nenita It is very good for him It is necessary for him and he does nothing in my house that would hurt you ”

“Don’t tell me he is playing billiards until it’s time for him to go to morning Mass,” I said impatiently

“That is, in fact, what he does quite frequently Plays billiards with Don Roberto Wins Wins every single party of carambole Wins always They are playing for much higher stakes than before, because I have it from good sources that Don Roberto is making profits of an unbelievable opulence

with a secret amalgamation process, and he rather enjoys losing money to your Felipe. Or from where did you think the pesos come which this Felipe of yours is rattling in his pockets?"

"If Felipe should ever suspect that playing billiards is Quaile's way of helping us with money, he would kill him," I said, burning with shame. "Felipe doesn't need him. He holds shares in several mines, he is involved in various enterprises——"

"Yes, I know all about his enterprises. He talks about them loud enough. And that's another reason why it is good for him to come to my house. It is a sort of a purge. He talks, talks, talks. All about himself. He of the deepest shaft in the world. He of the Veta Madre. He of the great family of the Condes de las Fuentes. He of the purest blood in all of Guanaxuato. He of the unbelievable conquests with women, especially married ones, especially in Europe, especially of noble birth and high station. He of the untold duels, the finest horses, the greatest understanding of the bullfight, the infallible eye for fighting-cocks. He with the past of a prince and the future of a king let him talk it out of himself. It helps him to forget that the present is not particularly glorious. He needs to shout louder than himself. That's why it is good for him to come to my house. I have seen hundreds like him, they all are like that when their luck turns against them. I told you men are funny creatures."

After Rosaura had left me I sat for a long time on the roof, my hands clasped around my knees, and tried to make myself see the humorous aspects of Felipe's pathetic struggle to preserve his precious Spanish pride and honour and dignity. It is my fault, I thought, much of it my fault. If I had not lost our child it would never have come to this. When I lost the child, that was when our luck ran out and a spring broke, I myself had never been entirely whole and sound since then. There had remained deep within me the never-stilled hunger of the childless woman. I could have helped Felipe, I thought, if only I had had a child. I wanted so to hold it, to nurse it, to feel the smallness of its body, the animal urgency of its sucking lips on my breast. A child for me and my hunger, not a flea-bitten little kitten, not a starveling dog saved from the river, not a basket of yellow ducklings, none of the pitiful substitutes. But a child, dear God above, or whoever is taking care of this

matter, give me a child and I won't suffer so much over my love for a mere man

"Well, what now, what now?" Rosaura would ask when she found me crying "Why do you look like the repentant María Magdalena, with ashes on your head and a nose all red from sniffling? What is all this extraordinary commotion about? Your Felipe isn't worth weeping for"

"There are things other than Felipe to make me cry," I said Rosaura surveyed me sharply

"Woman, how do you look? Have you no pride, you with your hair all gone thin and faded and a body like the seven lean years of Pharaoh? Mujer, you must put on some flesh, or have you renounced all intentions to hold your man?"

It was the third year of our decline, a long time since Rosaura had lost faith in making me beautiful by telling me that I was beautiful Since things between me and Felipe were going from bad to worse she scolded me, needled me, jabbed sharp, barbed little insults into me to keep my ambition alive "If you were one of my girls I certainly wouldn't permit you to slouch like that and sit and brood and lose hair and teeth But then, if you were one of my girls you would damn well take care of your body, because you would have to earn your livelihood with it"

"If I were one of your girls I wouldn't have to lie awake night after night, alone and worried Your girls have an easy life, they travel lightly because they're not in love with anyone," I answered bitterly

Rosaura studied me in silence and at last she shook her head in deep gloom "Precisely as I feared," she said "You are becoming a Good Woman, and let me assure you, there is no more exasperating creature on earth than a Good Woman If you are walking around as a living reproach, you mustn't be surprised if Felipe is running away from that insupportable, beaten, faithful-dog look of yours Don't you understand that your goodness makes him feel like a squashed mosquito? You're good and he's bad, and the more of a saint you become the worse of a scoundrel he feels himself to be, and what man can stand that? So now I want to tell you something The Cubana has left my house, and I would say good-riddance because she is a shameless, calculating, grabbing, man-eating bitch—but from now on I can't prevent her from doing harm to you And so you'd better pick yourself up and put on some

paint and go into battle before that filth of a Cubana grinds your Felipe to a pulp ”

“The Cubana ? Is that why—the Cubana——” I said, and I was drowning, submerged in such a coldness that I could not move my fingers and every hair on my head felt like a separate needle of ice I had been with Felipe for seven years, and he had never looked at another woman It had been the one security in all the volcanic insecurity of our lives, and now that was gone too

“How does she look ?”

“Better than you,” said Rosaura “At present better than you ”

“Why do you tell me that ? If Felipe does not love me any longer——”

La Rosaura threw her arms up to heaven “Woman, mujer,” she shouted at me, “have you no ears to hear with ? Felipe loves you, perhaps he loves you more than he ever did, that is what I am trying to make you understand He runs to the Cubana and hides between her thighs because he loves you Because he feels unworthy of you Because he is unable to face you Because he wanted to give you the life of a queen and failed Because, because, because Because of five thousand reasons which it bores me to recite to you But first and last of all because he loves you ”

“What am I to do now?” I asked I had been dying for a few minutes but began to try to live again

“You must help him, Nenita If it were not more than a little side step your man is taking, it would not be worth mentioning But there is this Romero Hernandez, this panderer, this slick fancy-man of the Cubana, did you ever see him ?”

I nodded, remembering poor Don Lorenzo’s ill-reputed young friend in all his robust and vulgar maleness

“Since the Cubana left my house Felipe has been seen in their company, and, I swear, a worse company he could not have found in all Mexico I do not know what these two are up to, but it can’t be anything good It’s high time you got your man back and away from them, and I can tell you that you won’t get him by washing his stockings and ruining your hands with housework and showing him a red nose from weeping Life would be too easy for us women if we were permitted to cry every time we feel like it ”

I pulled out my expensive old dresses, brought them up to the mode of the day, paraded in them for Felipe to notice I brushed my hair back to its old lustre, I cared for my hands, put rose water on them, used the perfumes and pomades Rosaura gave me, painted rouge on my cheeks and white powder over the five pockmarks on my face and the seven on my neck

"You shouldn't do it," said Felipe

"Not do what?"

"Use paint and powder Leave that to the women who need it You're different"

"However, you appear to be attracted by the sort of women who do use paint and powder," I said He did not seem to hear me He was smiling absently

"You know—the first time I saw you," he said "In Weimar At that deadly boring reception in the house of his Excellency, the one who was interested in geology—what was his name? It was your skin which fascinated me It made me curious I wondered how it would feel, that skin that had never been touched by powder You Saints, never in my life had I been possessed by such an all-consuming curiosity My finger-tips tingled when I only looked at you"

"Well, now you know how my skin feels"

"Yes," he said, still absentmindedly "Leave off the paint And don't wait for me, I shall probably not come home to-night I'm meeting some important people"

"Important people, indeed! I know your important people, the whole town is scandalized by the baggage whose company you're favouring Running around with the lowest puta of Guanajuato and, moreover, sharing her with this mackerel Romero! Aren't you ashamed of being seen with them, at the cockfights, in the cafés, everywhere? I can't understand you, Felipe, I can't A debauch, yes, an infatuation, perhaps—but not this degrading display of bad taste——"

I was too angry and too hurt for tears He looked at me with a queer sort of speculation "Don't," he said "Don't, Caralinda, don't upset yourself" He came over and took my face between his hands with a desperate, imploring sort of tenderness "Soon you shall understand everything," he said "But you must never ask questions of a man who's gambling for his life"

I did not understand him then But four days later the great mercury scandal came to its end, and Felipe was arrested

Since the night of the flood, when Quaile had dragged Felipe up from the pit, the two men had mended their ways, although there was too deep and painful a cleft and contrast between Bert's success and Felipe's failure to let them ever become the close friends they had been in their years of common struggle Quaile had bought a run-down arrostro (as the mills for crushing and amalgamating the ore were called) and had turned it into a thriving, much-discussed enterprise Moreover, lately he had acquired a small mine, the Esperanza, and was working his own ore Obviously Bert Quaile was well on his way to becoming as rich a man as he had always wanted to be Recently he had enlarged his domain by adding an adjoining hacienda with orchards, stables, and pasture to his arrostro, and every step of his progress was duly reported to me

" nothing to it, ma'am, really Dammed up the river, as we do it in Pennsylvania, and now I have my own water power the year round, quite simple And instead of letting men or mules trample for months on end over the crushed ore I constructed me some wooden stampers, that's all It's there for anyone to copy But the Mexicans are too indolent and the Gachupines too highhanded They don't care a fig if their men are poisoned with mercury and the feet of their mules rot away I'll tell you something, ma'am, humanitarian endeavour and sound economical thinking are one and the same thing Therefore, no labor de sangre in Mingo Creek !"

I had smiled at him when he had told me that, it always amused me when he came up with some of his lumbering self-made convictions and with his proud big words selected from the Pittsburgh *Gazette* His lip had hung down as though he were listening to something I had not said

"I'm calling the place Mingo Creek," he had said

"I'd like to see it some day, Bert "

"Well, why don't you come for a visit, ma'am ?"

"You haven't invited me yet Besides, I have no horse and it's almost as far as Marfil, isn't it ?"

"Why, if I may, I'll come for you with Peggy, sweetest pony you ever saw, and take you out and show you my place "

I had liked Mingo Creek because there was such an air of clumsy nostalgia about it Of the arrostro I had seen nothing

but the high, forbidding walls, the round watchtowers with rifled guards, all the usual precautions which made every mill and mine around Guanajuato appear like a redoubtable fortress But the adjoining hacienda was a restful oasis , it was, I had perceived, Quaile's dream of Pennsylvania, as I was sometimes dreaming myself a Helgenhausen into the alien and often hostile soil of Mexico His house had a gabled, shingled roof, and this alone was a relief after looking out exclusively on nothing but flat-roofed cubes for more than seven years There were three silly, struggling, lovable little apple trees , the water was rushing over the dam with a steady, sleepy sound, and I had lingered in the shade and peace of the porch until the sun had gone down

But there was nothing peaceful in the way I came cantering across the wooden bridge and into the yard of Mingo Creek with the note Felipe had scribbled on a chit of paper

"My only one, I am detained at the Cabildo A stupid miscomprehension Ask Roberto to put up the bail, he will know what to do I love you, always "

On the porch I found Bert in shirt sleeves reading the Bible With shaking fingers I pushed the message under his eyes "What does it mean ? Can you understand a word of it ?" I panted

"Why, yes, I believe I can," he said slowly "In fact, I was afraid it would happen I told Felipe that you can't touch mercury without burning your fingers, and I ought to know "

"What did he do ? Bought contraband mercury ? But everyone is doing it—"

"Well, ma'am, it's not quite as simple as that Illicit mines, contrabanding, smuggling, that's comparatively harmless and quite excusable After all, there is this artificial scarcity of mercury, and it's apt to corrupt people, those who need it as well as those who hold it If a law is constantly broken, it means there's something wrong with that law, and if people need something desperately enough they'll use desperate means to get it "

"Certainly you must know how desperate Felipe was these last months He was running in circles , he was—I don't know how to put it—like one of those animals of the woods who are hunting while they're being hunted "

"Aye Since the Tribunal de la Minería advised him that he would lose his claim on La Ramita if he couldn't reopen work

there within three months, he acted like a madman Personally, I didn't think it a great loss, but you know what an obsession that drowned hole of Santa Clara is with him I warned him for all I'm worth to lay off the scum he was associating with, but he wouldn't listen to me, not the great Don Felipe He just knew how to gain one hundred thousand pesos in one fell swoop, and there was nothing I could do Mercury, indeed ! Now he's got mercury and then some "

"I didn't know, Bert, he is such a fool, this Felipe ! But, Bert, if he was afraid to lose La Ramita, waterlogged or not, I am beginning to understand everything It's the only thing that holds up his pride You might as well kill him as take La Ramita away from him for good "

"I'm afraid you don't understand quite what happened yet, ma'am You see, lately there has been organized banditry, mercury has not only been stolen, but robbed by force The military escorts of mercury transports have been bribed, soldiers have been shot Bands have been operating through all the main districts, as far north as Sonora People have been killed for mercury, too many people, and Felipe has himself involved in it up to his stiff neck It got so bad that the Audiencia Real had to put a stop to it And there you are Probably Felipe thought he was being very shrewd, but he is no match for the criminals he was associating with He probably thought he was using them for his ends, while all the time they used him as their dupe But I wouldn't worry too much if I were you, ma'am He is a Spaniard, and a Gachupin may break any law in the Colonies, as long as he can bribe his way out "

"You will help him then ? At once ?"

Quaile rubbed his pipe against his nose and contemplated

"No, I don't think I will It so happens I have no loose money around, and if I had, I wouldn't send it down the drain "

"Bert," I cried, appalled, "Felipe helped you when you were in trouble—"

"Aye, ma'am But I got myself in trouble by hard work and honest mining, not by drinking and wenching and joining up with strumpets and pimps And I paid him back every single peso he had lent me, and more I sweated for him, and I don't see that I owe Señor Contreras another cent I made a mine of that waterlogged rat hole La Ramita, and if he let it go to rack and ruin after I left, it isn't my fault I gave him a bonanza, and

while everybody around was stealing the white from each other's eyes, I didn't keep for myself so much as the dirt under my fingernails Sorry, ma'am, but the answer is no "

"You hate Felipe I didn't know it," I said feebly He pushed a glass to my lips "Drink it down, it's good stuff Real Monongahela rye," he said "You're as green as an unripe apple "

It was the most awful beverage I had ever encountered Fourteen generations of wine-drinking ancestors turned over in their graves, and a few of them seemed to do it in my stomach A minute later I felt warm and much better than the occasion warranted "So that's the whisky you always talked about It's awful "

"Aye, but good for you No better medicine in the world Yes, since Louisiana belongs to the Confederation, I can get whisky, thank God Also, thank God, I'm now in a position where I can afford it "

"Yes, Bert, you're a rich man now I beg you, even if you hate Felipe—"

"No, ma'am," he said "I don't hate Felipe, and I don't love him I'm simply tired of him and his foolishness *Aburrido* Bored, as the Spaniards say "

"Bert, I beg you, Bert," I said, "you must help him For my sake—"

"For your sake ? Well, I've done a lot of things for your sake When I heard of the trouble he had about the claim for La Ramita I went and offered to take him as partner into my mine—and there's more to my Esperanza than meets the eye , he could have made enough money to put a few men to work at La Ramita to satisfy the Tribunal and keep his claim But no, he went ahead with his crazy scheme of getting rich in one stroke by peddling stolen mercury I did it for your sake I don't want to recount all the things I've done for your sake, ma'am I've had a lot of patience, ma'am And now I refuse, for your sake, to pull Felipe out of the mud another time For your sake, ma'am "

"All right, Bert," I said, getting up on unstable legs "Sorry I bothered you Now I must go to the Cabildo "

"Wait," he said, and pushed me back on the chair "I have to tell you something else, and this is about myself for a change You know how I feel about you When I'm sitting here on this porch all alone and making plans for the future, you're always

part of them I'm getting on in years and I'm making good money It's time I got myself a wife and a home and children You're too good, oh, much too good, for the life you're leading Wait, don't speak yet I know I'm no Don Juan, I'm not one of their flashy, showy, fire-breathing stallions, just a good reliable plough horse that knows how to draw a straight furrow With me you would have a clean Christian life and a family What do you say? Won't you make this place a home, Clarinda?"

There was a moment when all this became one with the gabled roof, the shaded porch, the cool sound of water over the dam a home, peace, rest And perhaps children And there was Felipe, jailed like a thief, alone and trusting Bert Quaile waited for my decision, his lip hung down and he took his pipe and rubbed it against his nose

"Thanks, Bert But it wouldn't be fair to you You see, I tried once before to be a wife and failed I would fail you too," I said, and fled from the temptations of Mingo Creek

When Felipe returned to me after his release he was a broken man He had extricated himself from the big quicksilver scandal by leaving the discovered cache of precious quicksilver flasks in the greedy hands of the authorities Leaving with them every peso he had hoarded towards reclaiming La Ramita, leaving a piece of his reputation, of himself, and of his honour Leaving behind the one hope that had held him up and had driven him into the desperate adventure

The Cubana had disappeared, Romero Hernandez had been shot in a fray between the regular troops and the bandits There had been much noise, shooting, hanging, shedding of blood, conniving, bribing, and, in certain instances, hushing up of the unsavoury implications Felipe had been cleared, not so much because the cynical and lenient authorities believed him innocent, but because one could not let a man of his race and class—which was their own race and class—fall into disrepute Unshaved, with empty hands and apathetic eyes, he spent most of the day in bed In the meantime I was kept in motion by the brutal, raw problem of survival How to pay for food and shelter without money, how to make this wreck of a man whole again And yet, in all the grinding need of those weeks, there was something, a queer satisfaction, a strange pride this was life, yes, this, too, was life This was the only sort of life millions and millions of women knew

Could I stand it? Could I bear up under it as well as my sisters did? Yes Oh yes, I could, as well, and better It gave me a new valuation of myself and of my own strength

"Sometimes Felipe seems to me like a sick man, he does not do things, they happen to him I don't know what this sickness is, I can only hope that it will pass," I said to Don Lorenzo He smiled his grey smile at me Since they had shot Romero he visited me almost daily, he talked incessantly without ever mentioning the one name that was on his mind I thought that he was afraid to be left alone, afraid of the silence that would engulf him and permit him to think the moment he stopped talking, reading aloud, quoting, lecturing

"I can tell you what Don Felipe's sickness is," he answered me "His sickness is Spain"

"To be a Spaniard seems an incurable disease" I tried a lame little joke "But you are a Spaniard yourself Is there no remedy?"

"I will tell you what sets the Spanish people apart from all others, Doña Clara It is their constant awareness of the omnipresence of death And, in spite of that, their total disregard for death It is a distinction which gives us Spaniards our queer, slightly ludicrous sense of pride and honour, I believe In Don Felipe, in myself, in every Spaniard of the upper classes is a good deal of Cervantes's immortal Don Quixote We are lacking in the quality about which a contemporary North American by the name of Thomas Paine has written a highly elucidating book called *Common Sense* It is very difficult for us Spaniards to differentiate between true and merely imaginary values Between appearances and substance We would rather hear false rhetoric than a simply worded truth We are in love with pomp and sweep and *grandeza*, as for Don Felipe, I am always touched by his loyalty to a phantom Spain, one that does not exist in reality"

Don Lorenzo began to wander to and fro over the small space of the roof, his hands clasped behind his back, as though he were talking to a class of students, I listened while I was laundering Felipe's shirts Lately we were living in such penury that we had dismissed the maids rather than have them witness our downfall and discuss us at the market and the public fountain Across the street, the roof of Granaditas was almost finished and a cross with green branches and fluttering paper streamers was planted upon it The huge

edifice was not a bad example of Spanish pride, pomp, and sweep

"There was a time, not so long ago, when being a Spaniard was something to be proud of," declaimed Don Lorenzo, "particularly in the Colonies. You might have been a mule driver in Spain, here you were the Blanco, the Europeo, you were the master, the aristocrat, the lord, you were a king by birth. You might have bad luck and lose everything, as it happened to Don Felipe—you would still be a Spaniard entitled to all prerogatives of your exalted station. But these times are past, Doña Clara, and, by Jove, there is not much to be proud of in Spain."

It seemed to me that Felipe had called for me, but when I went downstairs and peered through the door he was sitting there as before, with slack, hanging arms and dim eyes. "Won't you come up on the roof at least?" I pleaded. "The air is lovely and there will soon be a sunset of the first rate." He shook his head. "I have no time," he said. "Can't you see that I am working?"

I could not help grinning at myself as I left the debris of one Spaniard in the bedroom and returned to the wreck of another on the roof. "What were we talking about, Doña Clara?" Don Lorenzo asked, arousing himself from his brooding. "Ah yes, Spain! All the scandals in the royal family, all the wars into which Spain is pushed, the cynical shifting of allegiances, the clumsy playing off of one allied country against the other, all the secret treaties, with France and against France, with and against Portugal, with and against England! Spain, Doña Clara, has become a prostitute in a dark alley who is haggling over her price with her customers and in the end is beaten up and cheated of her dishonourable wages by all of them. And now the latest disgrace King, Queen, and the Infante Don Fernando, they all are fawning upon Napoleon Bonaparte in turns and trying to outdo each other in his favour. Are they blind? Are they cursed? Can't they see that the French Emperor is only waiting to take the crown of Spain for himself? Suicide, Doña Clara, suicide by selfishness and greed and glaring ignorance. It appears that men like Don Felipe are incapable of throwing in their lot with that of the people, either here or in the Peninsula. That's the sickness of Spain, and Don Felipe is a particle and a carrier of that sickness. He is afraid of the brewing rebellion,

he knows what it means when people on the streets mutter curses after him But, being a Spaniard, he is incapable of doing the rational thing He could take the side of the Mexicans and they would adore him and follow him blindly But to Don Felipe the lower classes have a bad smell and the Mexicans are an outright stink in his fine, Moorish nose, and he will not swallow the only remedy that might help him Oh, I understand him so well and all I can say is God have mercy on us all ”

It was a beautiful, rolling, resounding, and fairly convincing oration in the best Castilian style and manner, and at the end of it Don Lorenzo de Lara had taken on a very Spanish stance, in contradiction to all his condemning words With his fine, ink-stained right hand laid in the folds of his soiled, frayed old shirt, he stood there like any of the monuments of which his race can never get enough I thanked him for his analysis and went into the kitchen to roast some corn for Don Quixote

There was considerable unrest in Mexico during that year 1808, a faint and always delayed echo of the greater unrest that held Spain in its grip Until, on August 4th, the Intendant Riaño informed the community of King Carlos IV's abdication and of Fernando VII's ascension to the throne No one doubted that the abdication had been forced at the point of the sword and no one minded that There was a general feeling of relief and elation, of better days to come “Viva el Rey ! Viva Fernando VII !” the people shouted on the streets The town went up in a crackling, shooting, spontaneous outburst of fireworks There occurred a very high amount of a very high-grade drunkenness that night, and in La Rosaura's house the enthusiasm caused her guests to tear the hangings from the bed of a certain Chinita and to throw all the flowerpots down the steep hill for sheer loyal exultation

The following two days there was much headache about, and many people, men as well as girls, were seen with green leaves or yellow little balls of chewed remedies pasted to their temples as a means of sucking out the pain and combating the aftermath of their too exuberant celebrating By the third day Guanajuato was sobered up And on the fourth day the Intendant Riaño appeared in mourning before the magistrate and gravely informed the community that Don Fernando had renounced his throne in favour of Napoleon Bonaparte

That evening I saw Felipe for the first time really drunk, not gaily and charmingly drunk as over our first bottle of champagne, not stiffly and arrogantly drunk like a gentleman and a lord. But senselessly and disgustingly drunk like a miner stumbling from a cantina on a Saturday night. He had been drinking quietly and steadily all day long, all by himself. Whenever I entered the room he only shook his head and made a limp, commanding gesture with his hand "Out with you. Stay outside. *Vete, mujer*." His mood was black and bitter as gall. I heard him talking to himself in there and from time to time he would walk with heavy and ever more unsure steps to the cupboard for another bottle. Later I heard him cry and blubber, I heard him hiccup and swear, and at last I heard a heavy fall that frightened me. I went in and found him on the floor in a stupor. I tried to do what I had seen hundreds of poor Mexican wives do. I kneeled down, hating the sour, brassy smell, hating Felipe, hating myself, and, pulling his arm across my shoulder, I tried to lift him up. But he was too heavy or I was not strong enough. I pushed a pillow under his head, took off his shoes, loosened his collar, threw a blanket over him, and let him sleep off his drunkenness. Damn Napoleon, I thought, damn Fernando VII, damn every damn bastard in that damn Peninsula of theirs.

"I know what I ought to do," I said the next morning to Rosaura. "I should promise Bert Quaile to go to bed with him if he lends Felipe the money he needs to open La Ramita and hold his claim. There are still a few weeks' time left."

Rosaura examined me with her great, broad, amused, pock-marked smile. "And what makes you so sure Don Roberto would agree to such a deal?"

"Why shouldn't he? I appeal to him. He wants me."

"That's obvious. But Don Roberto is a man of rare principles. Moreover, he is in love with you. He wants to hear the nightingale sing, not eat it for dinner. Besides, Contreras would have to kill both of you. It seems a plan of very poor taste, Nenita."

They all called him Contreras now. Not Don Felipe. Not Señor. Not Your Grace. It was a small change, but it hurt.

"If not Quaile, then I don't know who, in the whole wide world, might help us," I said desperately.

"If no one else, Chinita might, in fact, I came here to tell

you that Andreas Ruiz asks your permission to pay a call this afternoon ”

“What’s that ? Chinita ? Andreas Ruiz ? I don’t want Andreas Ruiz to see Felipe the way he is today ”

“Andreas Ruiz does what little Chinita tells him to do and she asked him to see how he could help his friend Contreras I hope that he will not have changed his mind between last night and this afternoon ”

I remembered that Andreas Ruiz consisted of two different men, according to his intake of liquor The one was harsh, moody, somewhat brutal, narrow-minded, and sober , the other was affable, sympathetic, and slightly inebriated He came riding up the lane to our house and clanked a trifle too loudly into the more than modest room we pleased to call the sala Felipe, in his old morning robe, unkempt, unshaven, was sitting at the table, his head buried in his arms He looked up and he hated Ruiz for seeing him like this, in this house, in these surroundings, in this disgrace “*Holá, hombre,*” said Ruiz with more tact than I had ever trusted him with even in his most elated condition “I know how you feel and I share your sentiments ! Completely despondent over the terrible news from the Peninsula But, man, this is not the time to put ashes on our heads and lose ourselves in mourning We must do something Get up, amigo, shave, dress, have your servant saddle your horse Every man is needed Spain needs you Your King needs you ”

“My horse is lame,” Felipe lied glumly His horse was held at the Refugio as a pawn for unpaid feed and board, just as I had once been held at the hotel in Aix-les-Bains

“Never mind, I’ll lend you one of my horses,” said Andreas Ruiz “You don’t want to be missed at the solemn public prayer for his Holy Majesty, our new King Everybody will be present Directly afterward we are having a meeting , a committee must be appointed, resolutions must be made We mine owners must send money to our King for his fight against Bonaparte, a token of our loyalty ”

“I am not a mine owner any longer,” Felipe said, and for a moment I was afraid he might crack, break, feebly begin to weep about himself

“*Qué va, you’re not a mine owner ? You own La Ramita, don’t you ? You only have to begin work again* ”

“And where would I get the money to work with ?” Felipe

said grimly I was glad to see him stiffen with bitterness instead of going to pieces with self-pity

"How much do you think you will need?" Ruiz asked, still friendly and pleased with himself in his role of benefactor

"Fifty thousand pesos," answered Felipe, in whose brain exactly this amount had branded itself during months of brooding

"Brother, you're mad," said Andreas "With fifty thousand pesos we can send an army to Spain and beat Bonaparte"

"Forty-five thousand, at the least"

"Let us talk reasonably I am willing to use my influence with the Tribunal de la Minería to obtain a credit for you, but be reasonable, amigo As soon as you have a few men working in La Ramita no one can take the claim away from you How much do you need to begin work?"

"Ten thousand," Felipe said He was sitting erect now, and same of the old alertness had come back into his face

"Too much, hermanito Do me a favour and be reasonable Five thousand I shall call a meeting of the Tribunal, represent your case, and ask them to advance you a credit of five thousand pesos, to be repaid with twelve per cent interest within three months"

"What's the use of discussing terms, Andreas? You mean well and you are a true friend But the Tribunal won't give me five thousand I bet you anything they won't even give me three thousand"

"If I represent your case, I, Andreas Ruiz, I bet they will"

"And I bet they won't give me even a thousand," Felipe said He said it very quietly He was smiling with his lips only His eyes were glowing like a watchdog's eyes in the dark, or the eyes of a fallen angel

"Good," said Andreas Ruiz He, too, knew how to gamble "How much that I get you five thousand pesos?"

"Three thousand pesos that you won't even get me a thousand from the Tribunal," said Felipe He was still smiling, his voice sounded slightly bored, his hand went to his scapulary

"Accepted," Andreas said, and got up, he laughed because he could see the joke and savoured it He clapped Felipe on the shoulder "But hurry now, hombre, don't miss the public prayer, don't fail me now"

These were the three thousand pesos which stood as a last barrier between Felipe and final ruin Three thousand pesos

to reopen his mine, hold the claim, cling to his pride and dream
Three thousand pesos a last reprieve for a condemned man
He was a mine owner again, a patrón, a señor, was Felipe He
put silver dust on his hair, as if reverting to the fashions of the
past were another declaration of his loyalty to his non-existing
King who had sold out his country to Napoleon On several
occasions he even left the house with his old dress sword buckled
around his waist, as though he were going directly to an
audience with His Holy Majesty In the meantime bad news
kept arriving from Spain and there were orations heated enough
to set the town on fire Public prayers, public penance, novenas,
processions, clouds of incense, floods of Catalán brandy, rain-
bows of noble sentiments

Felipe and his friends were hatching a wonderfully fantastic
plan, they were going to outfit a ship, send troops to Europe,
break through every blockade, free Fernando, and take him in
triumph to Mexico Make Mexico the new heart of the Spanish
Empire, make it the headquarters from which to fight the sacred
war against this monster Bonaparte

"A rather romantic plan, but a most appealing one,"
remarked Don Lorenzo "Incidentally—does Don Felipe
know that Godoy had precisely the same idea? Scoundrel and
coward as the Prime Minister is, he has some political talent.
But our sovereign, regrettably, is averse to taking any risk or
hardship upon himself Rather than fight, he has resolved to
remain in France as Bonaparte's guest, in Monsieur Talley-
rand's undoubtedly amusing company and care The royal
family receives a handsome appanage, the Queen Mother may
divert herself with her lover-minister as before, and altogether
really not much has changed in their mode of life Spain, on
the other hand, is an uncomfortable country at present Murat
is standing in Madrid with his French army, Napoleon's
brother Joseph has been installed on the throne, and, by the
way, does Felipe know that the Conde Carlos de las Fuentes is
one of the grandees who signed the ignominious acceptance of
the little parvenu as their new King? Ah yes, Doña Clara,
crowns are becoming more and more unfashionable! But this,
of all times, is the time when Guanaxuato chooses to
celebrate this absurd proclamation of Fernando VII as King of
Spain, and to do it with all possible pomp and circumstance!"

Not only Felipe but the whole town had worked itself into a
delirium, the streets were thronged, there was not a suckling

infant, not a lame and blind grandmother, not a pickpocket, and not a beggar left in houses and hovels For the rich people it was an opportunity for displaying their wealth, their power, their loyalty, their generosity, and their talent for theatrical solemnization For the poor it was a fiesta to end all fiestas In their washed and patched Sunday clothes, with new sombreros on their heads, with firecrackers itching in their pockets, they had come to venerate the picture of Fernando VII, as they venerated any image recommended to them The oversized painting depicting an Apollo-like young god was placed in front of the governmental buildings, where the high clergy, the high military, the highest officials of the Spanish government, and the local magistrate were assembled, together with the body of mine owners and the faculty of the Colegio Everywhere the balconies were draped with silks and shawls and brocades, crowded with wives and daughters, mothers and mistresses, overflowing with mantillas, fluttering with fans, glittering with too much jewellery More jewels were pinned to the draperies, and, not wishing to conceal any of their wealth, the rich houses had even brought out their silver plates and jugs and goblets for show The regimental band seemed to play everywhere at once, flags were tautly cracking in the air like shots, and real shots were fired by people who could not contain their enthusiasm any longer There came a great moment for a small man, for the Intendant Riaño, as he received the royal pennant from the hands of a high officer, planted it next to the huge picture of Don Fernando, and called out with a voice not quite strong enough for the occasion "Castile! New Spain! Guanaxuato! For our Lord, King Fernando VII!"

There arose an enormous cry of cheers and jubilation, especially when the ceremony was immediately climaxed by a rain of silver thrown from the balcony to the people in the street So great was the enthusiasm that even the heavy silver salvers in which the lackeys had been carrying the coins were flung into the crowd (without, gracias a Dios, injuring more than six or seven people) Horses were led up by servants and flunkeys and runners and lackeys, and all the high authorities mounted their steeds, everyone trying to outdo the next in the splendour of steed and silver-loaded saddle and bridle, riding from street to street and from plaza to plaza, they repeated the ceremony, ending it every time with a rain of money into the scuffling, pushing, trampling crowd Indeed, it was a celebration to make

the people in the street aware that they were the subjects of a handsome, strong, rich, powerful, albeit unfortunately deposed and imprisoned, King

But as the showpiece of this richly decked-out banquet, there was served a parade of two hundred members of the town's élite to which one belonged either by pure Spanish blood, by birth, or, in slightly questionable cases, by the weight of one's money They were wonderful to behold, these handsome, slender young aristocrats as they marched past, their faces tense and grave as though they were going into a battle They all wore the same uniform, a very becoming outfit of their own design, which made them appear vaguely military, like a regiment of volunteers for their King and Country Wherever they marched past, the people broke into a frenzy of cheers, because they were such a proud sight to behold, and because it was so very rare to see noblemen walk on their own delicate feet But they kept marching on bravely, and if their new boots were pinching it was just one more noble sacrifice they could make for their unfortunate King

Goethe has spoken to me several times of the strange condition called euphoria It is the spectacular radiance of the sky before sunset It is the one painless hour of clarity and elated well-being of those who are, after a long, painful sickness, about to die The glow, the exuberance, the bathos, the theatrical, tragicomic, Don Quixotic, formalized, splendid glory of that day was euphoric

I stood on the balcony of the Casa Ruiz and watched Felipe march past in the column of young noblemen. He looked wonderful in his uniform and he smiled up to me and raised his sword in a fine flourish to greet me He was burning himself up in his own fever, burning himself to ashes in his own fire This was his day, his great, blazing, glorious apotheosis His and his King's and his cursed country's

He did not come home that night because he and his friends could not stop the ecstasy of celebrating It was an intoxication they did not want to end, never to end The Intendant Riaño took advantage of the feelings pitched to such heights He demanded a donation to be sent to Spain for the fight against Napoleon, and with a great Spanish gesture contributed two thousand pesos of his own It was overwhelming Never had a high official of the royal government been known to give Always to take Clearly, nobody could afford to

appear less generous than Don Juan Antonio de Riaño y Barcena, Knight of the Order of Calatrevas, Intendant of the Illustrious and Loyal Town of Santa Fé de Guanaxuato

Of the three thousand pesos with which to save the claim on his mine, Felipe still possessed seven hundred and twenty He had not quite paid for his handsome uniform, but he had bought himself a horse and saddle worthy of the occasion and contributed freely towards the costs of the parade He took his purse and flung every last peso into the salver which made the rounds

That was the end of La Ramita That was the end of Felipe Contreras's dream and of his perishable reprieve That was when he began to drink and did not get sober for three days

That was when he lost me to Bert Quaile

There exist hundreds of Spanish songs and poems in which a man bemoans his lost love She died, she left him, she became a nun, she married another man But that was not the way Felipe lost me

La Rosaura came down the hill and I was glad when I saw her I had been lonely and worried and I had even contemplated breaking an unspoken law and going up to her house

She sat down heavily, leaned Coco against the table, and smiled at me "Sit down, child, sit down," she said "I have to talk with you "

"Anything about Felipe ?" I asked

"Yes Sit down first, I have to give you a message from Contreras," she said, and her smile was all gone

"Did anything happen to him ?"

"No Nothing out of the ordinary He tried to get drunk in my house late last night and could not, clearly, it is bad when a man gets more sober the more he drinks Now Contreras is asleep He wants me to give you his message "

"All right What is it ?"

"I give you his message word by word You are to pack up whatever you wish to take along and be at Don Roberto's hacienda before noon He made a strong point of it that you must be there before twelve o'clock And he said that God and all the saints may bless you and that you may forgive him and forget him "

"And you say that he was not drunk when he sent that message ?"

"Sober as a stone"

"But what does it mean? Pack my things? What things? What does he mean—forget him? Before twelve o'clock? I don't understand a word of it!"

"I imagine you wouldn't? Well, you see, Contreras lost you to Don Roberto Quaile."

"Lost me? How can he lose me? Some crazy jealous notion of his?"

"No. You must pay some attention to me and try to understand what I am expressing with complete clarity and truth. Contreras lost you to Don Roberto Quaile. In a game. In a partie of billiards. In a partie of carambole."

"What perfect nonsense," I said, babbling nonsense myself. "How could he lose? He is a much better player. He never lost a game to Bert Quaile in his life."

"That is so. But last night he lost. For the first time, but he lost. He had not even given Don Roberto any points, because, understandably, it was a game of a great seriousness. I have to say this much for Contreras. He is, beyond a doubt, a far superior billiard player. It is not as if he had lost you in a game of chance. He trusted in his skill, and he lost."

I began to laugh. "It's the silliest thing I ever heard," I said, with very little breath left. "He can't lose me because he doesn't own me. I'm not his saddle or his horse, I'm not even his slave."

"About that I would not know," Rosaura said. "But you haven't much time. I'll help you with the packing."

"That's all crazy. I won't go."

"Oh yes, you will. You will, mujer," La Rosaura said, and suddenly I saw how enormous she was, her arms like tree trunks, her bosom like boulders in a stream. I was not afraid of her, but suddenly I understood how she could reign over a houseful of whores and keep a horde of drunken men under control every night. "I made myself responsible for it and I shall deliver you to Don Roberto's door before the clock strikes twelve," she said. "Don't you understand, woman?" she added, and the smile came back for a moment and was gone again. "It is the only thing you can do for this Felipe of yours under the circumstances. It is a matter of his honour. Debts of this sort have to be paid punctually."

"I am certain Quaile does not expect me to arrive at his hacienda with my trousseau in my saddlebag. He played a joke

on Felipe Why, it would be one enormous embarrassment for him if I took this seriously for even a minute ”

“I am afraid you have an erroneous idea about Don Roberto He, too, made me responsible for your prompt delivery I gave both men the solemn promise and vouched for it that the debt would be paid before noon ”

It still seemed too fantastic for me to believe, but I felt a slow, cold anger rise in me “And what was Don Roberto’s stake in that elegant partie of billiards ? As far as I know, he has no woman to lose ”

“No, he is a single man, a lone man His stake was the Esperanza ”

“What are you talking about ?”

“His mine The one of the latest great bonanza Last week he took out more than twenty thousand pesos’ worth of ore ”

I felt a curious coldness and weakness creep up the inside of my legs It was like at the time of the flood, like cold water rising all around me

“You are all crazy, you too, Rosaura Shall we play a little partie of carambole, Don Roberto ? Certainly, why not, Don Felipe ? What shall we play about ? If you stake your mine, I stake my woman, Don Roberto Agreed ? Agreed Where are the cues, Rosaura ? Such things simply don’t happen ! ”

“More often than you think, child In this town ? You certainly are not the first woman a man has lost to another What haven’t I seen them gamble away ! Their haciendas, their palaces, their entire fortunes, their stables, their horses Oh yes, their women too Not once but at least seven times did I see it happen However, I must confess, never have I witnessed a man stake anything as priceless as Don Roberto’s mine in a gamble It is a very great compliment to you If you were in my profession and if you knew how hard it is to make a man pay even fifty pesos for a girl you would have respect for Don Roberto in this matter, and for yourself too Nenita, does it seem you would feel better if you cried a little ? ”

“No, thanks There is nothing to cry about I wish to speak to Felipe ”

“If this Felipe of yours wanted to see you, he would not have sent me with his message He could not explain to you what I have to tell you I think he lost because he wanted to lose you ”

“Why do you say that ? ”

“Do you know much about billiards ? ”

"No Hardly anything "

Rosaura sighed "All the same, Nenita," she said, "all the same—I shall try to describe to you how it happened and make you comprehend You see, Contreras had come shortly before nine o'clock and he was in a bad mood and unshaved and no starch in his collar He sat down in a corner, away from the other company, and I went over to him and asked, 'Qué tal, Don Felipe,' and did he want to drink, to eat, to smoke ? I never asked him did he want a girl, because I knew he didn't As I told you, he was resolved to get drunk He took ten pesos out of his pocket and handed them to me and said 'Aguardiente As long as this holds out ' Bueno, you can drink yourself good and happy on ten pesos' worth of aguardiente, and I sent the boy up with a little keg of it and told him to keep Contreras's glass filled It was a quiet evening at my house, because most men were still exhausted from the great emotion and joy of having proclaimed a king A bit later Don Roberto came and he saw Contreras and he went over and held out his hand and said, 'Holá, boss !' the funny North American way he speaks, and 'Que tal ?' and 'I heard you have gone back to work in your mine,' and 'Congratulations ' And Contreras said only 'Gracias, thanks ' Dry and bitter, as if he had grit in his mouth And Don Roberto said that he had still some of the old plans and calculations of La Ramita at home and if the boss thought it would be of any use to him he would be glad to let him have them And Contreras said again, 'Thanks You don't seem to have heard that I gave up the mine for good, or have you ?' At that Don Roberto shuffled his large, dusty riding boots and then he said, 'Don Felipe, would you care for a game of carambole ?' Contreras looked at his aguardiente and at his hands and at last he answered, 'Yes, why not ?' They went downstairs where I have the billiard table, and then I heard the click-click of the balls A little later, when there was nothing to do upstairs, I went down myself, because I always like to watch Contreras play billiards, I have seen many billiard players in my time, but no one with an equal elegance and domination 'You should have become a matador, Don Felipe,' I said to him when he had won the game brilliantly, and he said to Don Robert 'Do you wish a revanche ?' Don Roberto said, 'Yes, with pleasure,' and began to search for another cue and chalk it very carefully, he always blames the cue for his losing, but

more as a standing joke 'Same stake as before ?' Felipe and Don Roberto made as though he were counting the in his purse and then he said, 'Sorry, I have very little mon on me shall we say four reales the partie ?' It sounded funny to hear Don Roberto, who last week alone had taken more than twenty thousand pesos' worth of ore from his mine, play for a claco But I comprehended that he did not want to embarrass Contreras, who probably had not five pesos left I went upstairs to look after two customers who had just arrived, and when I came downstairs again, Contreras had won this game too He had given Don Roberto thirty points, but in spite of it Roberto had made not more than fifty-two points in all Contreras was full of aguardiente but terribly sober, and he wanted to be unpleasant and nasty He was teasing and needling and taking the skin off Don Roberto 'You bore me, Roberto,' he said, 'you are of an insupportable boredom to me, Señor Quaile,' he said, 'you and your clumsiness and your game For twelve years I have been trying to show you how to do a *massé* and you still foul the shot every time You may be lucky in your mining speculations at present, Don Roberto,' he said, 'and I may recently have little luck in matters of business, because I am not born and meant to be a merchant, but when it comes to showing a little skill, you are barbarous' Don Roberto dropped his jaw as is his habit and winked a little at me and pretended not to have heard or understood 'I am always glad to learn from you, boss,' he said, 'show me once more how to execute that *massé* shot, for a favour' I understood that he wanted to appease Contreras because he knew he had drunk much and that he felt bad and also that it gives pleasure to Contreras to make a display of himself Contreras placed the three balls close together, as they have to be for a *masse*, he took the cue from little Charrito and he said, 'You hold the cue so and so and you lift it thus and you shoot from above, like this, and you give it not more than a flick and a jab, and watch that you don't put any weight on it, and this is the proper way of doing a *massé*' The little boy, Charrito, stood on tiptoe and watched, for he is enormously interested in billiards, and Chinita had slipped in, because she, too, likes the game, but more for the ivory sound of the balls which, she says, reminds her of China And so Contreras demonstrates every movement and gives that last little jab And then the ball, instead of hitting the red one, leaps into the air and jumps

off the table and Charrito has to catch it on the floor. It seemed terribly comical to Charrito, who is only eight, and he giggled. At this Contreras swerved around as if an alacrán had stung him and slapped the child in the face. Don Roberto pulled Charrito away from Contreras and took a handful of duros out of his pocket and gave one to the boy and said, 'Go, you midget, buy yourself some caramel and give the rest to your mother. You're not needed here.'

"The whole thing was absolutely ridiculous, absolutely without importance, and at any other time Contreras would have laughed about himself. But he was ridden by the devil and he could not leave well enough alone. 'I have a headache,' he said, 'I have black spots before my eyes, and who can direct his shots when it is darker than in hell?' he said, while he was standingly directly under my costly new billiard lamp, and in the sharp light his face looked whiter than anything white you ever saw in your life. 'Next time you want to hit anybody, look for someone your own size,' said Don Roberto, who was beginning to get angry too. 'Thanks for the advice,' said Contreras. 'In fact, next time I might feel like hitting someone twice my weight.' Don Roberto began taking off his coat and I gave Chinita a sign to leave the room because I don't like my girls to stand around when men are fighting. But Don Roberto quietly hung his coat on a nail and said, not unfriendly, 'It is very hot in here, Felipe. Maybe your headache would get better if you would go home and rest.' But Contreras was full of poison and wanted to be venomous. 'What a liar you are, Señor Quaile,' he said. 'So you have no money on you. So you can't play for more than a claco,' he said, 'while you carry a mule's load of duros in your pocket and throw five pesos to a fresh snotnose as a reward for laughing about me. You are a liar and a miser and I am unspeakably tired of you and your billiard playing and your petty ways and your fear of risking anything or daring anything or showing valour in anything. You may own a mine richer than the Valenciana, but you are still the same sweaty, barefooted drudge you were before I took you out of the pit, and you're still playing for a claco and counting your reales like a beggar at the church door. Boy,' he called, 'don't stand and gape, bring me more aguardiente!'

"Don Roberto seemed to contemplate all these insults, and his bald head grew red like a sunset, he clenched his fists and rammed them into his pockets, and I thanked God that he was

not a Mexican, for a Mexican would have pulled his knife at much less provocation But he was breathing hard and closed his mouth tightly, which is very rare with him, and when he opened it again he said 'I think you are mistaken about me, Felipe, and I am quite willing to prove to you how wrong you are I am not as elegant a billiard player as you, nor was my father a nobleman, nor do I forget that you helped me in Peru and later You may call me a miser, but I am willing to play another game, for any stake you name, any stake and no limit Provided you stake against it the only precious object that's still at your command'

"I wish to make you see it all, Nenita, so that you may comprehend how it happened There are these two men, with the billiard table between them, and they have been friends and they have quarrelled and fought and made up again, many times, as friends will Probably they have quarrelled over women before, down in Peru, or they may have shared the same woman, as men will in a mining camp where women are scarce and of a very low grade There is the lamp with that hard light which makes everything around seem black, and the light ricochets back from the green baize, as a billiard ball ricochets from the cushions, and it is very quiet all of a sudden There are moths and insects flying their circles under the lamp, and their shadows flicker on the table and on the faces of the two men, and you can hear the tiny sound of a moth burning her wings at the hot chumney of the lamp And you hear Andreas Ruiz singing on the terrace above—he believes that he has a voice, but he hasn't—and Chinita is chirping in to humour her best customer And you hear a gust of wind in the pirul tree outside and a little twig scratching against the wall And the boy comes padding in with more aguardiente and stops at the door and doesn't dare move And little Charrito is slipping in behind him and hiding in the dark corner, and he looks like a curious but frightened little monkey as he squats down there on the floor And Contreras goes over and drinks—he comes back to his side of the billiard table And he says with a certain sadness in his voice 'You know that she is not the sort of woman one may lose in a gamble, nor win either, Roberto, nor win either'

"You may accept the challenge or refuse But don't say that I am the one who lacks daring," Don Roberto says Then they are both quiet again and I make a motion and Contreras

says hoarsely 'You stay out of this, Rosaura, this is between me and Roberto only' He takes the two white balls from the table and juggles them in his fingers and Roberto says 'I'm waiting, Felipe' Contreras puts down the balls and leans over the table, and now the light is on his hair and his face is in the shade and he asks 'Any stake I may name? And no limit?'

"Any stake you may name, and no limit," Roberto answers

"The Esperanza Your mine," says Felipe "You may still withdraw if you care"

"I wouldn't dream of it," says Roberto "The Esperanza—against a certain person whose name we won't mention in this house"

"Thus it be," says Felipe When he steps back and the light is on his face again he looks as though he had lost twenty pounds in the last minute Hollowed out and every bone to be seen and you could count his pulse, it was beating so hard in his temples The sweat broke out on his skin as though he had worked very hard or had just come up from the pit or had crossed a desert on foot He searched in his pocket for a handkerchief but could not find one, and Roberto pulled his own handkerchief out and came round the table with great politeness and said, 'Here, use mine, it is fairly clean' And Contreras said just as politely, 'Thank you very much, how silly of me to lose my handkerchief,' and they went over to the rack and chose their cues Charrito handed Contreras the chalk, and when he noticed the little boy he grinned at him, pulled out the clacos he had won before, and flung them to him 'With your permission,' he said to me, and he, too, took off his coat and hung it up He shook his hair out of his eyes and brushed it back and slicked it down with both hands and then he took a very long draught of aguardiente They had played for so many years against each other that there was never any fuss or formality, but this time they measured the cues and, Don Roberto's being taller by a hair, Contreras went to his end of the table and, indicating a slight bow, he said 'Your start, Don Roberto'

"In the meantime the boy must have spread the news of the great game upstairs and the girls and their visitors came gushing in with great curiosity and also with respect for the magnificence of the game The men were laying bets, but they did it in a whisper and there was not much betting, as only the real drunk ones would take a risk on Don Roberto The balls were

placed in position and the boy tried to clear away the moths and their annoying shadows And then they began to play

"They played not better nor worse than on other nights, except that Contreras took more time than usual to calculate his shots He was completely sober, but the aguardiente had slowed him down, as a bull in the ring is slowed down after the picadores get their picas in him If you would know something about the game, Nenita, I could describe it to you, shot by shot, but we must not lose too much time It is only that I want you to see it and to understand how it happened Can you see the table? And the light, and the two men Don Roberto, ponderous and careful and fairly good but not brilliant, and Contreras, elegant but not quite keen enough, like a rapier that needs to be sharpened? And the people around, pressed against the wall so as not to get in the way, and a murmur rises at each good shot, and in the night outside a wind is coming up and makes the lamp swing a little And this is a whorehouse which has seen many strange things and upstairs three of my girls are entertaining visitors, and at the Refugio down at the foot of the Cerro a little band is playing and Contreras twice takes out Don Roberto's handkerchief and dries his hands in it The game stands eighty-five to eighty-two and it is Contreras's turn Two balls are fairly close together at the opposite end, and one in his corner This is when a mediocre player will play straight, but a brilliant player will take a risk, and play against the cushion to bring his three balls together

"Don Roberto leans on his cue and gives Contreras all the time in the world to take his choice, and Contreras walks from one end of the table to the other and almost lies down on it to sight along the balls Roberto smiles a little, as though he were expecting Felipe to elect the easier shot, and when he does not and the three balls click together in the corner, he bows his head a little and says 'Good shot, boss!' And someone shouts, 'Olé!' That's Andreas Ruiz, and Felipe waves his hand at him, a trifle arrogantly, and goes into a series of six until he hits a little too hard and the balls scatter He goes over to write his score on the board, and in the meantime Roberto gets two points and now the game stands ninety-one to eighty-four, and those who have put their money on Don Roberto begin to make bad jokes Contreras plays slowly but with great perspicacity They have played for twelve years and he knows

precisely how he has to place the balls to make them difficult for Roberto Click, click, clack, click Click And click There they are, all three together, and if Roberto is afraid to try his miserable *masse* now, he must stay behind and Contreras can hardly fail to make the three points he still needs If Roberto is either timid or clumsy now, he shall lose Lose another game of billiards ? No, lose his mine

"Don Roberto carefully chalks his cue, he relaxes his shoulders, closes his mouth, and, by God and all the Saints, he plunges into the venture He does his *masse* with all the elegance of a bear dancing at a fair, and Contreras stands by as though it were of no concern to him at all Click 'Olé, Roberto ! Olé, old one ! Olé for Don Roberto !' Charrito stands on tiptoes, Chinita digs her nails into Andreas Ruiz's sleeve, and Roberto goes into a spectacular series of nine Now he has brought up his score to ninety-three against Felipe's ninety-seven There is no question what Contreras must do now Repeat the shot, put the balls in a position for his own brilliant *masse* shot, and finish up the game But this is not what happens What happens now means either that his skill has been lost in the aguardiente, or else that he plays like Satan and the balls obey him as though they were alive They roll towards the spot he chooses for them, white, red, white, but instead of touching each other, they slow down, they stop, there is not enough space left to put a knife between them Never have I seen a more masterly planned and executed foul

"Chinita gasps a little Andreas Ruiz is swearing at Contreras Old Don Miguel Matanzas, who bet two hundred pesos on him, stamps his foot Contreras stands back and Roberto chalks his cue 'Roberto, listen,' Contreras says softly across the green baize As if they were alone, as if they had never quarrelled, as if only the two of them could understand things which were not expressed in words between them 'Yes, Felipe ?' says Roberto, and balances the cue in his fingers 'It is not a difficult shot, Roberto, and you did it nicely just before Remember what I told you ?' 'Yes, I remember,' says Roberto 'Remember ? No weight at all, only a short little jab' 'Yes, I remember,' says Roberto

"It was at that moment that I comprehended Contreras's wish to lose He was giving you up, do you understand ? He knew that your life would be easier and better without him and he was giving you up Whether out of a weakness or out of a

strength, that I cannot tell you, he is your man and you will know He stood there and hardly watched what Roberto was doing I must say that much for this Felipe of yours he has the nonchalance and the detachment only truly great gamblers exhibit at such moments Roberto made his *masse* and four more points before he missed Felipe pretended to take great pains with his next shot, but he actually threw it away With an infinitesimal application of his skill he could not have failed to make his three points But he made only one point and left the balls for Roberto to finish the game with ease That is how Don Felipe lost He could have won a mine but he preferred to lose you ”

It had been a long report and there followed a long silence while I tried in vain to collect my thoughts “I wish to speak to him,” I said at last

“I am afraid, Nenita, it will be impossible to wake him up,” Rosaura said “I filled him with a sleeping potion and put him in my bed He needs a rest and I daresay he deserves it It would be most unkind to disturb him ”

“All right,” I said “I shall speak with Quaile He only meant it as a joke He wanted to teach Felipe a lesson But it is a joke in very poor taste ”

Rosaura gave no answer She began packing my things

“Pray, be reasonable, ma’am,” said Bert Quaile “If Contreras should have won—and my chances were one to a thousand—would he have let me keep my mine? Not in a joke, he wouldn’t I took a very high risk and now that I was lucky enough to win, how can you expect me to renounce my rightly gain? Oh no, ma’am, I have not the slightest intention of sending you back to Contreras, and don’t you fool yourself about it Here you are and here you shall stay ”

“Don’t fool yourself either I shall run away, I shall climb over your high walls, and if you order your guards at the watchtower to shoot at me, so much the better You can’t put me in chains, I’m not a slave, this is not your barbaric North America where people are bought and sold, you can’t hold me against my will—”

“How you are ranting on,” Quaile said quietly, with a half-smile “No, I won’t hold you against your will All I am begging of you is to stay here for a little while, as my guest, if you want to call it thus Won’t you give me a chance to make you

feel at home in Mingo Creek ? This place needs a woman , it needs a housekeeper If I can't make you prefer this life to the muddle and need and mess and dirt and misery in which you were living the last year—either I am not the man I hope to be or you are not the woman I believe you are ”

“But Felipe——”

“Felipe, Felipe, is it still and always Felipe ? If you leave Felipe to himself it is barely possible that he will get on his feet again But with you—never I know him better than you do, or from another side, as no woman may know a man He has been running away from you for a long time Losing you was the best thing that could happen to him under the circumstances He with his Spanish bravado——”

“You are as crazy and full of bravado as any Spaniard ! To gamble your mine away against a much better player——”

Quaile's half-smile grew into a whole one “On the contrary, ma'am I expended a great deal of common sense and sober calculation on that game If I had lost, you see, I should still have earned enough money with my arrostro to buy me another mine soon Your lot, however—well, your lot would have been improved—at least until Felipe got himself into the next mess And for one reason or another, this seemed more important to me than being the owner of the Esperanza A piece of arithmetic as simple as two and two ”

It was this answer which made me give in and remain at Mingo Creek This, and perhaps the watering can which I noticed just then I had not seen a watering can since I had come to Mexico eight years ago But there it was, standing among a scraggly growth of daisies, a watering can, clumsily fashioned of tin, but complete, with a spout and a sprinkling piece, and someone had even made a crude effort at painting some birds on it “Do you water your flowers with that ?” I asked, lifting it from the ground and testing it in my hand

“That's just it, ma'am,” said Quaile “I am a very poor hand at flowers, but I'd like a neat border of pansies or something, like Mr Neville had in his garden on Rover Hill Well—may I show you to your quarters and present the servants to you ? I daresay you'll have to teach them a great deal ”

He walked ahead of me through the grounds and introduced me to a host of maids and servant boys and children, to dogs and horses and donkeys, he showed me barn and stable and handed over to me an empire of pots and pans, shelves and

larders, vats and kettles, all the stores and trappings of a well-stocked farm. At the last he took me into the whitewashed, soberly furnished room which was to become mine. The bed was narrow and frugal, innocent of any wicked intention, on the night stand a Bible was lying next to the candle-holder, on the table stood a bowl with three apples, their clean and pleasant breath pervading the room.

"Welcome to Mingo Creek, and here are all the keys," Quaile said. "I recommend you to keep your door bolted at night, or you'll soon have every dog and cat of the hacienda for a visitor." He must have read some surprise in my eyes that made him blush. He shook his head and began to laugh. "No, ma'am, not what you think," he said. "No one is going to molest you, not even to touch your little finger. Some day, I trust, you'll be my wife—and what scoundrel would dare show anything but the highest respect to the future Mrs. Quaile?" To him this seemed a very witty way of overcoming a ticklish situation and, visibly pleased with himself, he left me.

My mind was a complete void, my will all gone and my heart too tired even for tears. The tears and the unrest and the perpetual torture, the dreams without fulfilment and the yearning without hope, all these came, only much later as though one half of myself had been cut away from me, as a limb may hurt long after it has been severed from a living body, long after one may have resigned oneself to going on as a cripple who shall never again know the rapture of being complete.

During my first weeks at Mingo Creek I was almost content, there was a feeling of vacation, of a temporary relief, a passing rest, a brief freedom from want and grief. Surely, soon Felipe would come and call me back to him. He would persuade me to go with him, seduce me, steal me, rob me, sweep me with him, as he had done in Weimar. In the meantime there was much work to be done, and in the evenings I was tired like a farm hand and gratefully learning to sleep once more. Across the wall which parted the hacienda from the arrostro came the crunching noise of the grinders and stampers which crushed and mixed the ore, the slow squeak of the wheels, the ever-same soothing sound of water streaming in a broad rush over the dam, it all made a monotony in which day seemed to run into day, and my sense of the passing of time was dulled.

Visitors came and went at Mingo Creek. They came from Celaya, Querétaro, San Miguel el Grande, from León and San

Juan de Lagos in the north, and even from as far south as the Capital At unexpected hours there would be the hollow trap-trap of horses across the wooden bridge which linked the hacienda to the Marfil highway, again, there would be a furtive knocking at the gate during the night and Bert Quaile himself would pad through the yard and pull back the heavy iron bar Priests arrived, officers, students, and lawyers, decorous magistrates and shabby men without any visible means or mission They shared our meals, retired with Quaile for long talks behind closed doors, they stayed on for a day or an evening and unobtrusively slipped away They were quite diversified in many respects, but they all had one thing in common they all were Criollos

"Who are all these people and why do they act so secretively, Mr Quaile ?" I asked

"They're my friends and good men Some day, I'll tell you more about them," Quaile said

"And at what game are you an old hand ? Can't you tell me ?"

"What's that ?"

"I heard you say to Father Hidalgo that you're an old hand at the game and that he could count on you "

He looked at me with a glint of amusement as he knocked out his pipe to gain time for his answer "How do you like Father Hidalgo ?" he asked me

"I think I like him best of all your visitors Somehow he reminds me of one of my father's friends Goethe You may not have heard of him, but he is a very great man."

"So is Father Hidalgo a very great man In general I have no traffic with the Papist priests, but our little curate is a good man and a keen fighter and he knows what he is fighting against and why When Hidalgo goes up in a fierce blaze he always reminds me of the angel which appeared to Moses in a burning bush Some day we must ride to Dolores and hear him preach to his Indios "

"And your game ? Couldn't I play it too ?"

"I'm not sure you'd want to, once you know what it's called And if I tell you I wouldn't like the town crier to hear about it "

"I'm not a tattler, Mr Quaile "

"All right, then Let's call it insurrection Rebellion Revolution How does it appear to you ?"

"It sounds—I don't know—sinister," I said, and a small, unaccountable shiver plucked at my shoulders

"You know what Mr Jefferson said? 'God forbid we should ever be twenty years without a revolution' That's what he said. But it won't be the sort of revolution you have in mind. In fact, I don't think that there will be any fighting. I've been in a rebellion before and, I assure you, the bark is worse than the bite. Did I never tell you how they led me through the streets of Philadelphia with a sign on my hat and another sign around my neck on which it said 'Insurgent'?"

"No, you didn't. You have been in more queer adventures, Mr Quaile."

"This wasn't much of an adventure. A soldier kicked me publicly in the behind, if you will forgive my language, and a boy spat into my father's face and an old woman picked up a rock and threw it at me but missed, and everybody shouted insults at us and shook fists, and then we were thrown into a filthy hole of a jail and left there for three days and nights without a hearing and then I was kicked into freedom again, but my father was held for a long time, I went off smuggling whisky into Louisiana so that I could pay the lawyer's fee and get the old man free. But after his release he was taken with a lingering disease and he died two months later, no one quite knew of what. Heartsick, that's my guess. I was sore at heart myself. That's when I left my country and promised myself I wouldn't return but as a rich man. If that's their much-touted liberty—they can have it, I said to myself, and off I went. Mr Jefferson has a word for what had happened to us. Libertycide, he calls it. That means murder of freedom in Greek or Latin or something, you know?"

"Yes, I thought so," I said. "Oh, dear Rector Bemelmans, I thought, and had to smile.

He got up and fetched the Bible to read aloud to me, as he was wont to do during the evenings, when I had brought out my sewing basket. "'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown,' Revelation, Chapter 3, Verse 11," he began in his special Bible voice, but this seemed to annoy him even more and, keeping his forefinger between the pages, he slammed the book closed and remarked by way of an explanation "I am talking about the Whisky Rebellion. Ever hear of it, ma'am?"

"I don't think so. You want to tell me about it? You know

that I love to hear you talk about your country," I said, and that was no hollow flattery From that young republic in the North a fresh breeze was blowing which wafted away the odour of rot and decay that emanated from the dying Spanish empire

"It isn't a pretty story and I hardly know where to begin But take, for instance, my father and take Mr Neville My father was a poor backwoods farmer who had to clear every inch of the ground before he could plant anything Fell the trees, dig out the stumps, fight the weeds and the flies and the mosquitoes and the swamp and the fevers A hard life, ma'am, a very hard life But the Nevilles, ah, that's a different song They were of the landed gentry from way back, and old man Neville never had a callus on his hand, he could buy himself slaves and hire all the freemen he wanted to work his lands

"We lived in a cabin six miles from nowhere, whereas the Neville family had a fine mansion on Water Street and a country house on Rover Hill, full of French porcelain and elegant trappings The Neville ladies paraded to church in silk gowns and feather bonnets, while my mother, bless her soul, scrubbed and laundered and sewed and mended and milked and spun and laboured and cooked until her poor fingers were knobby like the growth you find on a sick tree I had just begun to toddle on my own legs when my father and my oldest brother were mustered for the Revolutionary War, and Mr Neville went also, dressed up like a drum major, and with a high commission When he came back he was a general, whereas my brother had lost an arm, my father was crippled with rheumatism, and the farm was worse off than before Mr Neville had grown richer still, and my father had nothing but some filthy bits of paper certifying that the Confederation was owing him all his pay Taxes were sky-high and it appeared that winning a war was just as hard on the people as losing one

"I can still hear my father swear and curse and pray and pound his head with his fists He and my oldest brother would sit and brood and talk about it hour after hour 'Remember, Bill,' my father would say, 'remember what they promised us? Remember how cold it was when we stuck up to the crotch in the swamps? Remember how it feels to be footsore and how it feels when you have the red flux and they make you march and won't give you even the time to squat down at the wayside and relieve yourself? Remember the nice speech your colonel made you before they cut off your arm? Remember this and

remember that? Remember what we fought the war for? Because of the high taxes the English made us pay What about the taxes now? Does it bore you, ma'am, to listen to this?"

"Not a bit, Mr Quaile But what about your rebellion?"

"I'm coming to that You see, the only stuff the west could grow was rye, and the only thing they could do with their rye was to distil whisky from it They couldn't sell or barter rye to each other, could they? Neither could they sell it farther east because there were no roads, and by the time the trans-Allegheny rye would have reached the cities it would have been twice as expensive as the grain they grew in the east But whisky, well, whisky they could sell and make enough of a profit to pay their taxes with and keep their mortgaged land from being swallowed up by the big powerful land companies Therefore, when Congress slammed a high excise tax on their only means of livelihood, that was the last straw They banded together and refused to pay

"Congress should have known better than to appoint a rich Tory like General Neville as inspector and make a stinking louse like Bill Graham collector of the whisky excise and have them inspect every farm and snuff and test and poke their noses into every still and stick their dirty fingers in every freeman's livelihood, and mark and chalk and brand your kegs, and decree and assess and prohibit here and permit there, reward informers, and draw their snoopers' pay and commission from the poor Yahoo's bloody taxes Well, Congress should have known that no self-respecting fellow in all the counties west of the Alleghenies would stand for such an attack on his liberties That summer, when I came home from Philadelphia to help my father with the crops, I found the whole county in an uproar I was a young lad who had never seen a shot fired in anger, and now I stepped straight into the blazing rage of the men That's when I began wishing I could some day take a hand in politics I'd like to speak up for the people in Congress, for the hardworking, poor people whom I know, and go back to the people and explain to them the why and wherefore of state and nation I wish, though, I had all those fine words at my command a man needs in politics Now take for instance Mr Jefferson—"

"And what happened to your Whisky Rebellion in the end?" I asked quickly, before he could lose himself in a lengthy ode to his shining hero

"The end? Well, I'm afraid there was a bit too much whisky involved in our Whisky Rebellion, and once the fellows got drunk they were beyond reasoning. When they went out to Chartier Valley and burned down Neville's Rover Hill they had lost out. That's the pitfall of every mass movement. But I've learned a lot in that rebellion, and I believe in Father Hidalgo's power. After all, he doesn't permit his Indios to come to church drunk, and I daresay he'll be capable of keeping them sober when their liberation is at stake. Also, we won't start before we have all the troops on our side."

His eagerness made me smile. "But what have you personally to win or lose in the independence of the Spanish colonies, you old insurgent?" I asked. "Or is it a sport with you?"

"Well, first of all, my father was a colonial, and there comes a time when a man has to take sides if he wants to feel like a decent fellow. I just can't forget that summer when I came home and my father was much thinner and smaller than I remembered him, and his face and eyes yellow with jaundice, so much had the bitterness affected his gall. And my brother waving that stump of an arm and crying 'Why don't they brand and mark this, too, and put an excise on the flesh and bone we left in the war?' And my mother dragging herself back and forth and in the afternoon she said 'I think I must lie down for a minute before I fix up your supper.' And I brewed her a cup of tea and poured a shot of whisky into it and a spoon of honey and brought it in to her. And she said, 'Why, Bert, such a luxury!' One would think I'm the Queen of England. Why, Bert, my lad,' she said, 'how you're spoiling your mother!' And an hour later she was dead and the neighbours' wives who washed her body that night found a growth as large as a head on her abdomen, she really worked like a dray horse in harness to her last hour, bless her heart, and never a word of complaint. Well, ma'am, I still can't think of her without being greatly, very greatly affected."

Quaile got up and turned his back to me and began pacing the room, he held his hands clasped behind him, and his fingers opened and closed convulsively until he had regained control over himself. "Now, ma'am, what do you say? Shall we read a few verses from the Good Book?" he said, and opened the Bible. "The Second Corinthian epistle 'We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not

seen for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal ””

The apathetic and restful well-being of the first weeks gave way to a torment of unrest, worse than any I had ever known. Then, after weeks and months, when all my expectations had been disappointed and all my waiting came to naught, when Felipe made no attempt to see me, when no secret message arrived from him, when he stayed completely and irrevocably away from me, something began to die off. It was only a small sample of death, not as violent as when I had lost my unborn child, but, as in all death, there were first the pain, and then some giving in to the unavoidable, and then a deep empty nothingness, and at last peace. And after a while I began to recuperate and to live again, out of some reserves in me of which I had not known. I began to be grateful to Quaile for being kind and considerate and so very patient. I was fond of him, not more nor less than I had always been. And as I knew him better from day to day, I more and more respected him. If Quaile had sent me away then, I should not have known where to go or what to do. If he should have left me it would have been the ultimate catastrophe in my life. Slowly the idea of marrying this huge, warming, comfortable stove of a man insinuated itself into my mind and grew more attractive as time went on. If he could give me the children which Poor Albert as well as Felipe had denied me, it would be more than I deserved. I began to think of the children who demanded so urgently to be born out of my womb. A little boy stole himself into my sleep and dreams. He was fair, blue-eyed, he had scrubbed red cheeks, he held an apple in his hand, it was a picture-book boy. Also, it was a healthy change from dreaming of Felipe, with silver dust in his hair and brandishing his sword, as I had seen him last.

Rosaura came once or twice for a visit and carried some vague and changeable rumours to me. Felipe was said to court the younger Matanza daughter, the one whose reputation was slightly tainted but whose father was the wealthy and influential Don Miguel. But there was no betrothal and a while later it was said that Contreras had left the town to follow some adventure of his own. Again some people believed that he, with his own hands, was steadfastly grubbing in the abandoned rat-infested wormholes of La Ramita, which might bury him any day in a final cave-in. And then the waters

closed over his name and Rosaura stayed away from Mingo Creek, probably to give me time to heal and to forget

I flung myself into work and tried to keep every minute of my waking hours filled with activity I planted a herb garden I crossbred some of the native wild flowers and cherished my modest success I trained two of our nondescript mongrels to behave like gentledogs I laid out garden beds and irrigation ditches I watched with sincere interest the progress of an artesian well Bert Quaile was digging and the construction of a cave to be used as a wine cellar Also, fired by Father Hidalgo's example and words, Quaile was trying to improve the lives of his workers and their families and called for my assistance

"I'm giving them a share of every quintal of silver that goes out of my mill, just as they get it at the Valenciana But that's not the solution, ma'am The more I pay my men, the drunker they get on a Saturday and the more mischief they commit And their womenfolk and their little brood go as hungry as ever I wish I knew how to handle the problem"

"Couldn't you hand a part of their pay to the women directly? Let the men have their share of the output to get drunk on, and give the women the men's daily wages to buy food with? Women know better how to manage money"

"Say, that's not a bad idea, little bright-head Worth trying, in any case"

From then on the patio gate was opened for the women each Saturday morning and they shuffled in and crouched around the porch, a sleepy-looking, cigarrillo-smoking crowd, waiting apathetically, and not without perpetual distrust, to be handed part of their husbands' wages I hoped to God that the men would not beat their wives more than ordinarily over this arrangement, but Quaile was very proud of it, and of me also, and began dreaming of a school for the children Nothing elaborate, just a lean-to where they might sit in the shade and receive instruction. Father Hidalgo had promised to keep on the lookout for a suitable teacher

But all these domestic duties were not enough to fill my emptiness, and I threw myself with a vengeance into the movement for independence which was secretly gaining momentum Here and there literary societies had sprung up (" and without our democratic societies Mr Jefferson would never have become President," said Quaile) where under cover of

discussions about culture and philosophy the kindred spirits met, the conspiracy took some sort of shape, and plans for action crystallized within the core of the initiated

It would be very handsome if I could remember myself as a fiery prophet of freedom for the oppressed, as one of the full-bosomed, billowing women who forever defend a barricade on monuments for liberty, as a flag-bearer and a heroine But this was not the way I acted, nor, so far as I could observe, was a conspiracy for the liberation of a people the heroic and purposeful action later legend and history make it out to be I smile when I think back of that year when, in the wake of Bert Quaile, I was trotting to secret meetings and assemblies, travelling as far as Querétaro and San Miguel, listening to speeches, signing resolutions, making the acquaintance of men whose names, to later generations, became of a bloody and tragic significance I do not know whether all revolutions and rebellions have this in common or whether it was a Mexican peculiarity, but I remember that those secret societies were dominated by a great amount of personal vanities, of self-dramatization, of striving for importance and glorification There prevailed a tiresome repetition of phrases and doctrines There was much immature thinking, much threshing of empty straw There were but a few with Father Hidalgo's selfless purity of purpose, too many people who had to be lured into the movement of promises of gain and property Some were drawn in by their fear of being left behind on the losing side, and not a few had to be bought outright

What was read, spoken, and discussed in those societies seemed pitifully harmless to me, in Weimar it would have been considered stale and boring twenty years ago at a tea party of the Dowager Duchess Amalia Only the shadow of the Inquisition, the well-known and well-demonstrated ruthlessness of the Audiencia Real, gave these meetings a slight chiaroscuro of romantic danger It was romantic to dance the fandango in one of the lovely palaces of San Miguel el Grande, to flirt with the handsome Criollo officers of the Queen's regiment, while being on the alert every minute for warning signals or even fatal discovery For music and dancing were only a screen to shield the secret assembly downstairs, where weighty resolutions were made and ultimate plans drafted It was romantic to conceal political messages under jewel-buckled garters, to give a nameless man and his horse shelter for a night and send him off in the

morning, with a purse of silver, on his perilous task of inveigling more troops to our side More menacing, and more dangerous than anything else, appeared to me the mutual distrust that hung like a thick fog over the entire conspiracy

I remember the last meeting we ever attended It took place in the small dignified town of Salamanca, and there was quite a crowd tightly crammed into the badly lit, airless sala of an old house Further Hidalgo had excused himself, but some of the military leaders were present Captain Allende, a bit gruff of manners, his heavy chin propped up somewhat uncomfortably on the high collar of his uniform, and handsome Captain Aldama, who liked to banter with me and to dance, but who took pains not to yawn while scenes from Hidalgo's translation of Molière's *Tartuffe* were read Doña Maria Ortiz was sitting next to me, she was a fine figure of a woman and a pillar of the movement, or so I understood The assembly was rustling with excitement about their own daring To read a French author, read him aloud, read a satire about bigotry in a translation made by a priest to them it seemed the very peak of audacity For me, however, who had duly plodded through these stilted lines during the French classes of my adolescence, it was greatly boring and I was glad when it came to an end

Most of the speeches that followed were what Quaile's Mr Jefferson called "the gaudy tinsel of rhetorics," happily soaked up and enthusiastically applauded by the audience Bert Quaile began to fidget and to rustle the pages I had copied out for him He had promised to read a condensation of his own nation's Declaration of Independence, which might possibly serve the Mexicans as a sample from which to fashion their own I knew that my giant was mortally afraid of speaking in public and I could see how uneasy he felt in his fine new black frock coat I gave his hand a little squeeze before he lumbered up on the estrada, where he held his script under the light of the one tallow candle our thrifty host had provided The pages trembled a trifle in his large hand and I was sorry for him He seemed like a boy in the throes of an examination, and he enunciated each syllable with great care, eager to make the assembly fully appreciate the beauty and honesty of his own country's principles

I knew every sentence by heart, in Spanish as well as in English, because I had helped Don Lorenzo with the translation But they took on a fuller sound and meaning as they

rolled out over the listening heads of the conspirators By and by Quaile overcame his initial stumbling and let himself be carried by the sweep of Mr Jefferson's words and by the rapt attention of his audience Doña María put down her nervous fan and searched for my hand and held it in a firm and sisterly grip of her small Mexican fingers Quaile read on, pausing once or twice to snuff the candle at his side, and then continued with greater and calmer assurance I liked him very much at that moment, and I could see him, back in his own country, talking in his own language to an assembly and convincing them point by point of the progressive ideas he was advocating Elected by people of his own kind to represent them and speak up for them Congressman Quaile of Westmoreland County Senator Quaile of the state of Pennsylvania And I would sit somewhere in the gallery and be proud of him "What did father tell them in Washington?" our oldest boy would ask me when I came home "Did they like it? Did they cheer for him?" "Yes, son, they did Your father is a fine man, the finest there is" I could feel the boy leaning against my knee—he wore a blue suit of Manchester cloth, I could almost touch the roughness of its texture—and the younger boy was lying on his belly in front of the fireplace and reading aloud in his primer Doña María withdrew her hand, and when I returned from my wistful little detour something had changed in the room The air was still close and hot, but the people were growing cold, restless, and ever colder while Quaile was stating point by point his nation's case against her former King Not the King of Spain, only the King of England, to be sure, but nevertheless, a king Consternation spread over the faces as he came to the last paragraph in which the free independent states absolved themselves from all allegiance to the Crown and dissolved all political connections between themselves and their mother country " and for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour," Quaile finished, folded up his pages, dropped his jaw, and peered with his expectant half-smile at the assembly There was a bewildered little silence, a pause in which they tried to recover their countenances, then a subdued clapping of polite but utterly unconvinced hands We were alone among strangers, Bert Quaile and I I felt closer to him at that moment than I had ever felt before

There was no other speaker on the evening's programme and we excused ourselves as we had quite a long ride before us As I was waiting in the dark doorway for my horse to be brought up, I overheard a conversation, between the tiny glows of two cigarrillos, about Bert Quaile

"What can you expect ? A barbarian, a barbarous country without tradition and religion——"

"Divine providence, indeed ! He is a heretic, I assure you, an atheist He will need watching, this Señor Quaile " And each cigarrillo described an arc and retreated deeper into the patio

For almost half of the way we rode silently and at a brisk trot through the night As we were approaching Irapuato, Quaile came up behind me and we let the horses walk side by side for a while "I sure scared the daylights out of them," he said, apparently in the midst of a monologue "But that was to be expected" I heard him chuckle to himself "You know what my father told me ? He happened to be in Philadelphia and just passing the old Statehouse Yard when the Declaration of Independence was read for the first time He said there were very few respectable people present, just the usual loafers and tobacco spitters, and nobody quite understood what it was all about What can you expect then from the Mexicans ? Well—shall we let the horses rest for a little ?"

He turned off the hard road and walked his large grey mare into the heavy mist which stood knee-high over the pasture It was a hazy night, with small clouds hastily driving past a small waning moon I rode Peggy into the softness of mist and grass, I could see Quaile only as a black bulk We did not dismount but kept the horses close together, and they hung their necks and began snuffing and sleepily grazing in the dark

"They have come to a resolution at last," Quaile said "They are going to declare their independence in January, at the great annual fair at San Juan de Lagos That's quite propitious, because it is the traditional gathering place of a multitude of Mexicans and Indios, and it leaves us enough time to have everything well prepared and organized Also, it is far enough from the Capital, and before the Audiencia Real shall even hear of it everything should be settled and done in a peaceable way Five more months until we can pack our bundle and go home I can hardly wait to hear you talk German with my grandmother "

I collected my breath and my courage "I'd love to go to your country with you, but—"

"Well, what's preventing you?"

"You haven't proposed to me for a long while, Mr Quaile And—"

"All right I'm proposing now," he said, and in the misty dark I could see him take off his hat "Will you marry me? At long last?"

"Yes—but there is something—you never asked me about my past—"

"What's there to ask? You were a young innocent chamber-maid and Contreras seduced you He is the sort of an eye dazzler who could seduce his own maiden aunt"

"It's not that simple There is a long story I have to tell you—"

"Not now, bright-head You have five months to tell me your story But not just now"

He took Peggy's bridle and pulled her a bit closer so that I could feel the side of his mare rubbing against my leg He rested his hand on her neck, and still with his hat in his other hand, he bent over and gave me a respectful and experimental kiss His face was cool and moist in the night, and I had grown accustomed to the smell of his pipe It is not unpleasant, I thought, I shall get used to it I shall have children

The cocks were crowing and the sun came up when we arrived at Mingo Creek It was a fine chilly morning late in August 1810

The sixteenth of September was a quiet, clear Sunday, with three or four playful little cloudlets painted into the deep mountain-blue of the sky The patio of the arrostro stood quiet and empty of work in the sabbatical stillness, and the stampers and grinders and crushers were taking a rest.

I was tying up my carnations and Bert Quaile was sitting on the porch, with a tall drink at his elbow, reading the word of God to Loro, who loved to have the Bible read and expounded to him Like an old farmer in church, he would fall asleep under the soothing influence of the Holy Scriptures but wake up the moment Quaile stopped "Amen!" Loro would say, the only word he ever learned from Quaile

“ The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed The Lord is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy,"' Quaile was reading
"He will not always chide neither will he keep his anger for
ever He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us
according to our iniquities For as the heaven is high above
the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him As
far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our
transgressions from us Like as a father pitith his children,
so the Lord pitith them that fear him' Psalm 103, Verses 6 to
13," said Quaile "Amen," said Loro I could feel the peace
and tranquillity of the hour, on my skin, in my body, in my
hands that touched the carnations, in my listening heart
"Neither will he keep his anger for ever," it echoed in me "So
far hath he removed our transgressions from us" I brushed
my hair back with my arm and smiled at Quaile

"How your garden is coming along, bright-head!" he said
"Upon my soul, young Neville never had anything like this
Holá—visitors?" he interrupted himself as the hoofs of a horse
in full gallop came pounding across our wooden bridge He
got up to have the gate opened for the rider But the man, who
looked like someone's servant, did not enter He only got off
the horse for a brief talk with Quaile at the gate, and then he
swung himself in the saddle again and galloped away in a stir
of dust The horse had been flecked with sweat and the man
had been pale and his shirt had shown dark patches of sweat
where it was sticking to his back Quaile remained standing
at the open gate, deep in thought, his chin pressed against
his chest, at last he closed the heavy doors and secured them
with the iron crossbar

"What was it? Bad news?" I asked

He looked at me but did not seem to see me He sat down
and mechanically picked up the Bible again without reading it
He put it down, took his cold pipe in his mouth, and bit hard
on its stem "Bert," I said, "don't What happened?"

"Do you know how it is when a blast goes off in a mine
before the men have time to get themselves into a safe dis-
tance?" he said, at last breaking a long harassing silence
"When it goes off, through some miscalculation, some fault
in the fuse or the powder! It's a damn ugly, bloody thing to
happen Well, and that's precisely what happened now I
don't like it, bright-head, I don't like it a bit"

"An accident? In the Esperanza?"

"Worse Things have begun popping long before their time

In Querétaro, in San Miguel, perhaps in Guanajuato too I'll have to ride to town and find out "

"But what, in heaven's—— Or aren't you allowed to tell me?"

"I don't want to get you involved more than necessary, now that matters are taking this nasty turn. Besides, the fellow was so excited he got it all scrambled up. But it seems that the authorities have been informed of the conspiracy, that orders of arrest are out for all the leaders, and that Hidalgo has accepted the challenge and is on the march with a few hundred of his Indios. Not running away, mind you, not trying to hide, but ready to take up the fight."

"But how—what—who spied on us? Who was the informer?"

"As far as I can make out, a sick man in Querétaro who was a member of our society. When he felt poorly he sent for the priest to confess and receive absolution. He seems to have told everything he knew, given all the names he remembered, and then he contentedly turned up his toes. I hope he'll go directly to hell and damnation. The priest, another polluted coward, scurried away in great haste to break the confessional seal and ingratiate himself with the authorities. Which rich man, what priest, what authorities? And that I don't know. Next, the Corregidor of Querétaro received orders to arrest a number of people. I don't think you met him, but I saw you talk to his wife, Doña María Ortiz."

"Oh yes, I do know her. She seemed fine and sincere."

"Fine and sincere and gallant. She has a great heart, has Doña María. When she learned of the danger for Father Hidalgo and Captain Allende and the other leaders, she gave a secret signal to the Alcalde, a good, honest fellow if there ever was one. Doña María was immediately arrested, but the Alcalde threw himself on a horse and galloped to San Miguel to warn Captain Allende. In the meantime a few more arrests were made, and what seems to have happened then looks very Mexican to me, or perhaps it is only human. When there is a storm, all the yellow leaves blow off the trees. At the first sign of danger all the yellow bastards who had barnacled themselves to the movement hustled into the anterooms of the governmental offices and outdid each other in making accusations, and giving away every little secret they knew, the knock-kneed, blubbering blackguards! Sold out their independence and delivered the best men of their country into the hands of

justice And what sort of justice ! I wish I could break their necks ”

“ But the curate ? Hidalgo ? Allende ? Who sent you the message ? ”

“ I’m just trying to piece it together The Alcalde arrives in San Miguel but learns that Allende isn’t in his quarters, has probably gone to visit Hidalgo in Dolores The Alcalde hunts up another leader, Captain Aldano, and together they gallop for all they’re worth to Dolores They find Allende and wake up the curate in the middle of the night Now you have four fearless and resolute men in that sleepy little Indian parish, and what happened then is mere conjecture If you listened to the servant who brought me the bad tidings, there was much shouting and lamenting and crying, ‘ We are lost, everything is lost, our lives are lost, what are we to do ? ’ But that sounds to me a bit too Mexican, and the servant probably gave his personal version of it Anyway, what he told was all one breathless jumble, for he has been riding since seven in the morning ‘ There never was a night like this, not since our Señor Jesucristo was born,’ he said, well, you know how their emotions run wild with them Only so much is certain it was Hidalgo who decided to act rather than to give up and take to his heels ”

Quaile began walking up and down the length of the porch as was his habit when he was moved or excited and did not want me to notice it But I knew the way his fingers moved, and his wrists turned white, so hard did he clasp his hands behind his back

“ I wish I could have been in Dolores last night,” he said “ I wish I could have been of some use But it seems they don’t need any foreigner to help them There was a small detachment of soldiers from Allende’s regiment stationed in Dolores, they obeyed their captain without a question opened the jail, took the prisoners out, and put the few Gachupines of Dolores in Not a shot fired, not a blow exchanged so far The people of Dolores hear the noise in the night, they grab whatever machete or stick or stone comes to their hands This is their night, now it’s the Gachupines’ turn to suffer At five o’clock in the morning Father Hidalgo rings the church bell, he speaks to his congregation, well, you’ve heard him preach, and you know what torches our quiet, amiable little curate can hurtle into a crowd ! There’s one huge great shout ‘ Viva la

Independencia! Viva America! Death to the bad government!" And that, my little bright-head, is how a rebellion begins. By the time the curate sent off his messenger to warn certain people and to announce to them that the fight for independence has now been forced into the open, he himself was on his way towards San Miguel. I understand he has a few hundred armed men, badly armed, I'm sure, for this isn't Pennsylvania where every man has his shotgun and every boy can hit a squirrel before he is ten. But what these *Indios* are lacking in equipment, they'll make up in fury. You don't know them as I do. They're scared and docile man by man, but in a crowd and when they are incited, they are as strong and murderous as a stampeding herd of wild buffaloes. Ah yes, the great *señores* did not realize what courage and resolution there is in that little fighting-cock of a priest—or they might have thought twice before tearing out his grapes and breaking his pottery and demolishing his little *Indios'* workshops."

I was glad to see that Quaile had talked himself out of his shocked gloom and into a sober enthusiasm, if such a thing exists. Sober but sincere. Behind his heavy-set figure, his bald head, his heavy jowl of a man nearing forty, I could for a moment perceive the youngster he had been tall and rank, the eager disciple of Jefferson, the boy who demanded his rights and stood up for his convictions, the child of a revolution, the fighting freeman, the son of a young republic, the only North American I knew. This was not his country, but it was his fight all the same, it would be his fight wherever people were oppressed and struggling towards freedom. And there was not a shred of the theatrical about him. Even the best men of Mexico had cried "We are lost, our lives are lost!" Bert Quaile did not seem to be aware in the least of his own person or of the danger in which he might get himself. But then, it suddenly occurred to me, neither did I. Courage is a queer quality, lack of fear is not courage. Only those who are afraid and act in spite of it are truly valiant. I was not afraid yet, neither for Quaile nor for myself.

"What are we supposed to do next?" I asked. "Ride to San Miguel and join Hidalgo?"

"Not at all. You'll keep yourself nicely and quietly at home, my girl. If you should be needed for one thing or another, I'll let you know. As for myself, the curate wishes me to remain

here and watch how things are going in Guanaxuato. Luckily, the authorities are not suspicious of a rich mine owner like me. I think I'll ride into town and take a good look."

All through the week Quaile was shuttling back and forth on the highway which linked the small but rich mining community of Marfil to Guanaxuato. Mingo Creek was situated halfway between the two townships, and neither did Quaile tell me on what missions he rode off so merrily, nor did I ask him. In any case, he served as my daily gazette, and through him I learned much of what happened during that strange week of uneasy waiting.

In Guanaxuato it was a week of great confusion, fumbling, bungling, scurrying and aimless groping, such as had not been seen since the abdication of Fernando VII. At the head of the headless doings stood the Intendant Riaño, the absolute ruler over town and province. A tyrant may be brutal, cruel, sanguinary, he may also be, and often is, generous, extravagant, valiant. As long as a tyrant is strong and sure of himself, he will be respected and even loved. But there is nothing so pitiful and malignant as a half-hearted tyranny, a tyranny with a bad conscience and nerveless hands.

Don Juan Antonio de Riaño y Barcena, Knight of the Order of Calatreta, Colonel of the Royal Army, Commander of the Provincial Troops, Intendant and highest official of the province and the illustrious and loyal town of Santa Fe de Guanaxuato, was without a doubt an honourable man. He was not extracting bribes, he did not misuse his position, he was no woman chaser, no drunkard, he was as just and honourable a little man as was possible for one navigating amid so many powerful currents. But he was a born subaltern placed by a whim of destiny where a leader was needed. He was an old officer, raised in the strict discipline and tradition of the Spanish fleet, bound by his oath to Spain and her King. He also was a progressive and well-read man, who wished the insurrection to win. He was on a constant teeter-totter, he was a small man with great fears. Above all, the wealth of the town had polluted and muddied his thinking, as wealth pollutes inevitably whatever it touches. The only idea which seemed to stand firmly in the Intendant's oscillating mind was this. Here was a rich town, where fortunes in government taxes, stores of silver bars, piles of the Crown's property were entrusted to him. Whatever his sworn duty on the one hand, and whatever

his private convictions might have been on the other, the property of the government and of the Spanish citizens he must defend and save

I think that the Intendant was one of those mediocre persons who function perfectly well so long as they receive orders from a superior It was his tragic misfortune, and that of all of us, that no orders were forthcoming during that critical week The government was rudderless, had been so for a long time There was not even a Virrey to represent an equally non-existent king In Spain there were at the moment two Juntas, each one claiming to represent the people and the guerrillas, and both contradicting each other A new Virrey had been appointed and sent to the Colonies, with orders to come to a friendly agreement with the people of Mexico But his ship was delayed, he had only arrived, he had chilled and almost insulted his staff by the simplicity of his dress and manners and by the blunt truths he had told them Indeed, it was learned much later that the new Virrey was received with costly pomp and fanfare in the Capital on the very same day when Hidalgo had proclaimed his country's independence and had girded himself for the fight As it was, there were no orders, no Virrey, no superior official to give commands to poor Riaño, and he was left to blunder along in his own confused way

He was sending out urgent appeals for military help in all directions, to the generals in San Luis Potosí, Guadalajara Barricades were thrown up, trenches built, defences erected, the soldiers were drilled, the bugles blew at all hours, the people armed themselves with machetes and sticks and kitchen knives and shovels, with the hammers and hand drills and chisels they used otherwise so adroitly in the mines Houses and shops were closed, even the loafers and loiterers of market and portales were pressed into labour on the defences, and for those who had no weapon at all, rocks and stones were carried from the quarries and piled up in high mounds at every corner of the town

The streets were thick with contradictory rumours, offices and barracks in a turmoil of contradictory orders It was said that Indians in an unbelievable number were joining Hidalgo They came from their remote villages, they crept out from barrancas and arroyos, they were climbing across the mountain ranges, rolling down the slopes, a landslide of small, fanatical

earth-brown men to follow the flag with the picture of their own dark Virgen de Guadalupe How many were there? Twenty thousand? Fifty thousand? Eighty thousand? Nobody knew for certain

Another Sunday night passed and I was waiting for Quaile because I worried lest he should grow too bold and fall into some trap But it was almost dawn before he came home I had never known him to get tired, but that morning he appeared particularly fresh and elated "Something strange is going on in town," he reported "They are knocking down their barricades and filling up the trenches I hope it means that Riaño is coming to his senses and has decided to hand over the town to Hidalgo, just as it was done in San Miguel and San Felipe But there is something queer about it, they're working in the dark, quietly and busily, like gophers And I also saw something that would have amused you They're taking stuff to Granaditas, you should have seen it, bright-head, there's no end to the mules trotting up the street and into the patio of Granaditas Never in my life have I seen more mules or busier mules, nor muleteers as noiseless as these "

He blew on the coffee I had brewed for him and chuckled "Did you ever collect ant eggs?" he asked me "As a child? They make excellent fish bait"

"I was never a little boy in Monongahela County, Bert," I said, smiling

"I guess they aren't eggs, really, larvae or something In any case, they are what ants put in the bank, rich ants, that is What you do is you spread a piece of white cotton on the ground and then you stir up the anthill The first thing the ants can think of is to save their precious eggs They run and rush and drag and carry and get them in safety on that nice white cloth Then you fold up the cloth and take the eggs and go fishing in the pond "

I looked at him, wondering what he meant He was grinning happily "You should have seen those mules, and the running and trotting and unloading and carrying stuff into the safehold of Granaditas Such goings on Such excitement in the middle of the night And not a sound Bags with silver and gold, bags with hundreds of thousands of pesos, all the money they extracted through taxes and monopolies, all the treasures the churches have piled up in their coffers, all the quicksilver

flasks, all the jewels What a sight, light bright-head, and now it is all neatly put together in Granaditas You see what I mean ?"

I shook my head a bit, waiting for him to go on
"Fish bait, ma'am," he said "Fish bait"

When the town woke up the following morning the people must have believed in black magic All the defences, erected so hastily and with so much sweat and zeal, had disappeared The streets were scarred and uneven where the trenches had been dug, but that was all No more soldiers to be seen, nothing but some bugles calling reveille at the granary Slowly the news filtered through to the people The Intendant had suffered another change of heart He had taken all the money, all the provisions, all the food and grain, he had taken the very lifeblood of Guanajuato and stored it away in Granaditas He had withdrawn all the troops into his sumptuous citadel of a granary He had assembled all the Spaniards and such few Criollos as chose to stay with him and was fortifying himself and his handful of noblemen in Granaditas

A murmur, a shout, a cry of enraged indignation rose in the streets "They have betrayed us, they have deserted us, they are throwing us to the wolves," the people cried "This worthless coward of an Intendant, he and his Gachupines and señores ! He has left us without food, without protection, without arms ! For three hundred years the Gachupines have never thought of anyone but themselves and of their own full pockets and their own fat bellies, and they are thinking only of themselves now Down with Riaño ! Viva Hidalgo !" muttered the people on the streets, they did not shout it yet, they only said it under their breaths and moved it in their minds and talked about it in the cantinas, because that day no miner felt like going to work and there was a very great thirst in all of them They picked up the stones which had been piled up at street corners and on the flat roofs of their houses, and every man carried a few of them on his person They were used to carrying loads and a few stones did not burden them and a man with a good sharp stone in his hand was better than a man unarmed

In the meantime Quaile came and went, came and went, livelier than I had ever seen him and full of good hopes for a peaceful and comparatively unbloody outcome One town

after the other had fallen to Hidalgo without resistance, Salamanca, Irapuato, Silao were in his hands. And at last there came the day when the little curate—who by now had been acclaimed General Commander of the Americas—established his headquarters at the Hacienda de Burros, only four leagues from Mingo Creek. Quaile had ridden over to make his reports, in an excitement he could hardly contain, and as I looked after him I had the impression that his heavy, broad-rumped grey mare might at any moment unfold a pair of wings like Pegasus. But when he returned the outer corners of his eyes hung yet a trifle lower down towards his temples and his long chin was still a little longer. He knocked at the door of my room and shuffled his dusty riding boots on the threshold. "Hidalgo could not see me in person," he reported somewhat too nonchalantly. "Well, I guess a General Commander has more important things to do, he was in a session with his general staff. But I had a pleasant talk with one of his young officers. Would you mind awfully if I left you alone for another hour or two? I got orders to attend to a little matter of a certain significance——"

"What's ailing you? Since when are you talking like a Spaniard to me?"

"I'll hurry as much as I can. I don't like leaving you—what with an army of thirty thousand men roaming the hills. Well, it can't be helped. I'll be back presently."

"Take all the time you want," I said. "I'm not made of liquorice."

"Just keep the gate closed and the dogs in the yard. Any-way, I have guards posted in all four towers, and I leave you six hand-picked boys outside to take care of the hacienda."

"You are treating me as if I were Marie Antoinette," I said. "What's got into you, Bert?"

"Nothing. Just that I have seen more drunk and crazy men in my life than you have. By the way—can you shoot?"

He put a large pistol down on my table. I looked at it with distrust. "I can load it," I said, "and La Rosaura showed me how to shoot, although I'm frightened of the bang. I can't hit anything, though."

"That's all right. It's loaded. Just leave her on the table for anyone to see. It's always good to let people know that you are armed."

"You are not becoming dramatic like a real Gachupín, are you, Bert?"

"Certainly not I'll be back long before suppertime Well—hasta luego"

"Auf Wiedersehen Take good care of yourself, Bert"

"Aye Well—hasta luego Stay in your room, hear me? Be a good bird, Loro, and I'll bring you a nice banana"

"Amen," said Loro

"If you need something—the boys are outside watching the gate"

"What a fusspot you are," I said, "what a fussy old fusspot You and your insurrection! Go, run along, good-bye"

He stood in the door, looking at me with a beseeching, droopy Saint Bernard expression, and I went over, got up on my toes, and kissed him For all the thrill it gave me, we might have been married twenty years "Good-bye, Mr Quaile," I said "Good luck"

"Bless you," he said "Thank you, and bless you Hasta luego"

I sat down and sewed some buttons on Bert's enormous shirts I got up and conversed with Loro I looked at the clock It was an afternoon like any other Tomorrow Guanaxuato would give up without resistance as the other towns had done Later I went out in the garden, cut a few flowers, arranged them in a tin jug, and put them on the table The men Quaile had left as my special guard stopped talking when I passed by them on my way to the stable I had remembered that the dogs had to be fed One of the men gave a low, long whistle, like an owl Another one made a joke I did not understand and they all laughed I called the dogs and put the bowl with their food in front of the stable door Along the highway yonder the sound of many voices approached the bridge It was a peculiarly uncouth and dissonant chorus It might have been the singing of a procession but for the marchlike rhythm, it might have been soldiers but for the disorderly shuffling of sandalled feet under which a pillar of dust arose outside our gate There was some commotion among Bert's hand-picked men, who had up to then been crouching near the gate in their own lazy fashion, some of them half asleep, with the sinking sun on their brown faces, others playing a game of ranuella Now they got up on their feet and scrambled towards the gate The chorus outside dribbled out, and something was shouted

across the wall in an Indian dialect I did not understand I stood there with my hand on the cool wet muzzle of one of the dogs

Our men shouted an answer back Then a stone came flying across the wall and fell into the grass I turned to go back into the house Now Quaile's men were all crowding around the gate, two were scrambling up the wall, curious to see the chorus outside One ran over, picked up the stone, and flung it back across the wall One was pushing back the iron bolt of the gate

"The patrón wishes you to keep the gate closed," I said

"Who wishes what?" one of them said rudely It was a young fellow with a large sombrero cocked at an angle over his broad-cheeked brown face

"Don Roberto wishes it And I wish it also," I said

"If you wish the gate closed, go and close it yourself," he said I saw then that he was drunk, not very drunk, but just enough to think this a fine joke The gate was open now On the highway across the bridge stood a ragged line of men, they were covered with dust and they looked tired and angry On their frayed sombreros they wore a roughly stamped picture of the Virgen of Guadalupe A few were coming across the bridge, some of them had sticks and machetes

"Hidalgo's soldiers," said one of the men inside the gate There was some shouting back and forth "Qué tal?" asked our men "What's the news? How are you faring?" But the men outside were in no mood for friendly fraternization "Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe," they called "Viva, Viva la Virgen," our men answered "Death to the Gachupines," they called from the bridge "Death to the Gachupines," our men called back "Death to the Blancos!"

"Did you hear that?" the boy who had been fresh before asked, suddenly standing close at my side "Death to the Blancos! How do you like that, Blanca? How does it appear to thee, cursed Blanca?"

I wish Bert had not left his hand-picked men here, I thought fervently I wish he would come back soon This is getting uncomfortable What disturbed me most was the complete absence of sense or reason The men outside were not even drunk, only angry And our own men seemed to hate me Why?

"Stealing our pay from us, eh, you Blanca? Throwing our

money to the women, teaching them disobedience, turning them into snarling bitches, that's what you did Feeding more meat to your dogs than our mothers have eaten in a lifetime," they muttered behind me I understood with a creeping chill of apprehension that our modest attempts at improving the lives of their familes had not found favour with the men

I went to the gate to close it, but before I had reached it a number of the men on the bridge had pushed themselves into the gap and blocked my way "Is there anything I can do for you?" I asked "We are thirsty," one of them answered sullenly I retreated a few steps, with my hand in the collar of the dog "This is your house," I said politely "And the cistern is full of water Drink all you want"

"We don't care for water," their speaker said The gate stood wide open now, jammed with men, while a few stragglers were still arriving along the highway and across the bridge The dog at my side bared his teeth and growled Something came whizzing through the air past my head and struck the dog He screamed, leaped into the air, and then fell on to his side, a tremor ran through him and he was dead Only then did I discover the arrow that was quivering in his neck Never had I seen any creature killed by an arrow I stood between the two groups of men, isolated Ours were shouting, the intruders were silent, angry, advancing in a compact mass Two more of our dogs were running towards me, another stone was flung, and the dogs took their tails between their legs and slunk away into the stable

"You are among friends," I said to the intruders, and it made me feel like a coward I should have beaten the Indio who had killed the dog, it would have been more honest and perhaps he would have understood it better "Our men will give you whatever you need," I said meekly I was terribly alone and there was no bridge of understanding between me and these brown, sullen, hostile creatures They were brown and I was white, that was all they could see I had never realized how it felt to have a skin of the wrong colour Now I knew it Now I was branded myself by the pigment of my epidermis, inescapably, dangerously, cursed and set apart, and whatever I might say or do to appease the brown ones, I could not change my skin

Twelve generations of good stout ancestors helped me to turn my back on the men and walk slowly towards the house,

although I had an urge to scream and run I had seen bull-fighters turn their backs towards the brute of a bull like that and walk away from him, gracefully and arrogantly Probably they, too, were pouring out cold sweat while they did it

I locked the door of my room and waited for Quaile, but he did not come The hours went by, the sun was gone, supper-time was long past, but Quaile did not come I listened for his horse to trot across the planks of the bridge, but all I could hear was the men in the yard Now they were talking, now singing, now shouting Now they were catching turkeys and piglets, now the animals were screeching and squealing, and then they were silent, ready to be cooked Now the maids had been ordered from the kitchen to clean and prepare them, and there was more singing, the raucous laughter of men, the tickled giggling of the girls They will eat their fill, they are making a little fiesta of this, and then they will fall asleep, I thought to myself I dared opening my shutters and peering out through the chink The sun had been gone almost two hours, but the evening sky beyond the crest of the hill was illuminated as from a belated, second sunset I tested the bitter smell of smoke and burning wood, and it took me a few minutes of disbelief before I began to understand that the orange spectacle in the clouds came from a fire, from a burning hacienda In the advancing evening there was an unruly movement all round Mingo Creek a coming and going through the narrow defile, a constant exchange of shouted questions and answers, feet shuffling past on the highway, campfires on the hillside

I was caught in the tiny islet of my room, amid the relentless stream of the insurrection Several times the men pounded on my door and tried to break in, but went away again to more pleasurable tasks Through my peephole I saw the guard on the watchtower next to the house was still up there, but he had put aside his rifle and was exchanging jokes with the men in the yard I sat down and opened the Bible at random and read "For I was hungered, and ye gave me meat I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink I was a stranger, and ye took me in naked, and ye clothed me I was sick, and ye visited me I was in prison, and ye came unto me "

I had learned from Quaile that wherever you opened the Bible it gave you answer and solace I closed my eyes and let the soothing words echo in my mind I prayed, without words but with all my heart, that nothing had happened to Bert, that

he might come home, safe and soon, and that my friends, the insurgents, might not burn down the hacienda in an absurd misunderstanding which I, the Blanca, was incapable of clearing up for them

But my trusting application was shattered by a huge, savage outcry in the yard, Loro fluttered, frightened, from his perch on to my shoulder and I, just as frightened, banged the shutter close. I knew what had happened, now they had discovered the cave where Quaile's whisky and wine were stored, they were breaking down the entrance to it, there was the clanking of hammers on iron bars, chisels biting their way into brick and adobe, axe and machete against the heavy boards of the door, and the creaking and splintering of the wooden casks. And then the nightmare began.

They had never tasted whisky, that wonderful stuff in which Quaile believed almost as much as in the Bible and in liberty, and they were completely and madly drunk within minutes, or so it appeared to me. Smashing of bottles, yelling, roaring, fighting. A shot from one of the watchtowers, just one. A huge bonfire was burning in the yard, its restless flicker, its harsh smoke intruding through the narrow slits around my doorframe. A wild howl, hardly human, and then the wave of drunken men surged over the wall into the patio of the arrosto. I could not see it, but I could hear it and conjure it all up in my frightened mind. I was sitting in the dark, holding Loro on my lap, covering him with my hands to keep him from talking, I had pushed every piece of furniture against my door, hoping fervently that the drunken crowd would forget me over the machinery of the mill into which they were now smashing in a senseless, vandal frenzy. I could picture all the horrors across that wall. Indios, in their ignorance, getting caught in the wheels, trampled under the crushers and grinders, broken like ore between the teeth of the stampers. I could hear their shrieks and imagine the fury of their revenge on the bedevilled machinery which they could not understand.

I had been down on my knees, trembling, praying, I do not know how long, when the mob gave up the destruction of the plant and remembered that I was still alive. Never before had I thought of people as a mob, but there are moments when such a word suddenly assumes its full, its ugly and terrifying meaning. There was a raving, drunk, senseless, infuriated mob and nothing but a door, a flimsy bolt, a ridiculous barricade of

table and chairs between me and that mob. Now they were shouting at me to open up and come out or they were going to get me. Now there was a muttered taking of counsel. Now they were flinging stones against the door. Now a silence. Now a higher, louder shout of triumph. Now they had brought the mighty iron drills and chisels, the miners' tools, and the thin boards were bending and cracking under the assault.

I got up and groped for the pistol which I had put on my bed, I was almost as afraid of the firearm as I was of those against whom I would have to use it. Loro, in a panic, clamped his beak into my ear, and there was a sharp, almost reassuring pain and a warm little trickle of blood. There was a roaring outside and the roaring in my own head, and then, through it all, I seemed to hear Quaile's horse gallop across the bridge. Or perhaps it was only a desperate illusion, as one dying of thirst in the desert might hear the bubbling of a spring. The door was splintering, and I raised my arm with a great effort, my right hand with the pistol was shaking so badly that I had to hold it up with my left as I took aim at the growing gash in the boards.

Framed in that jagged hole was a fragment of the yard, an infernal confusion of yellow flames, black figures, arms, hands, fists, tools of destruction. The face of an Indio, appearing directly in front of the ruined door, seemed very large and covered everything else from sight. A crazed, frenzied face, which suddenly opened a gaping mouth, dark and wide as a cave, from which escaped a shriek of fear, louder than all the turmoil outside. I saw the eyes in that face turn up their whites, and then I saw and recognized the forelegs of a rearing horse, hanging for a moment suspended over the Indio's head and then hoofing down on him without mercy. And so Bert Quaile had come back in time for my rescue.

I heard a piece of iron clank to the ground and the Indio's body bump against the door and cut off my vision, as though a bundle of rags had been stuffed into the gashed boards. Outside there was an uproar, tumult, chaos. Through it and above it all I heard a single, commanding voice, hoarse, unfamiliar, and sharp as a blade. A howl of protest, then one shot, and another one. An outcry. And then silence. Slowly, slowly, the body outside my door seemed to slide down, as though the bundle of rags were hesitatingly withdrawn from the gap, and the brightness of the flames in the yard entered my room again.

All noises had receded and, with my senses sharpened as never before, I could perceive the swishing sound of the slain or shot Indio sliding down along the boards and landing with a last muffled thud on the floor Someone gave one great heave against the hinges of the door and it crashed wide open Against the flicker of the bonfire stood blackly outlined the figure of a man I stared at him and it was not Quaile, and I stared at his horse nervously dancing behind him and it was not Quaile's grey mare but a chestnut I was still standing near the wall against which I had backed in my frozen fright, still holding up one of my hands with the other

"Careful, careful, you don't wish to shoot me, Caralinda," said Felipe He stepped across the killed Indio at my threshold, and there was a queer, cruel smile on his face He had changed, aged, and there was the shadow of a beard on his lean cheeks that suddenly made me remember the young crusader in the book about Richard the Lionhearted, with whom I had been fatally in love when I was nine

"Poor little woman, did these drunken beasts frighten you ?" he said softly as he stood before me He took the pistol out of my hand and stuck it in his belt "Loaded ?" he asked "Good, we can use every available firearm "

"You—" I wanted to say, but it came out as a sob

"Come away," he said, "we'd better leave before this rabble gets impudent again "

"I can't leave When Bert—when Quaile comes home—I—they wrecked this machinery—"

"Don Roberto will not return He was arrested It was he who sent me to you As they led him away he asked me to take care of you I am here with his blessings, you understand Let us leave while we may "

"But why—how did they arrest him ?"

"His usual clumsiness, I daresay Although he is a Blanco, he is no Spaniard A foreigner, suspected of conniving with the insurgents Today he was found in our trenches talking to one of our officers How did Don Roberto get into our trenches ? How did he learn our passwords ? What dubious business had he with one of our men ?"

"What will happen to him ?"

Felipe shrugged "Time will tell For that matter—what will happen to any of us ? Come now "

"Where do you want to take me ?"

"To the only place that will be reasonably safe during the next few days"

"Granaditas?"

He nodded while his glance rested on me with a strange mixture of sadness and irony. As his eyes took me in, inch by inch, I could see myself in the bright illumination of the fire as he must see me. With my feet in Indian sandals, with my peasant blouse and my coarse peasant skirt, and with the big apron I had tied on for feeding the dogs "Quite the farmer's wife," he said with his old, short, soft laugh. "All the same—I had almost forgotten how lovely you are, Caralinda. Or let's say, I tried to forget it, I tried, tried, all you Saints, how hard I tried to forget—"

There it was, the old magic, the inexorable enchantment, the bondage I could never break "May I take Loro along?" I asked "And a few things?"

"Of course Qué tal, Loro, viejito? May I help you with your bundle?"

"No, thanks," I said, hastily rummaging in my wardrobe. It had just occurred to me that I could not possibly present myself to Felipe in bright daylight the way I was dressed. I pulled out my new white gown, stockings, shoes, and the bonnet to go with it, folded it carefully, and packed it into a basket. "I'm ready," I said. Loro had anchored himself firmly to my shoulder "With your permission," said Felipe "You don't want to soil your little feet" He lifted me up and carried me lightly across the threshold, stepping over the Indio he had shot. The yard was a chaos of broken bottles, smashed earthen pots and bowls, of bones and feathers, of spilled oil, food squashed into the ashes together with vomit and dirt, the fire was burning down, the dogs were lazily licking their greasy chops, the stable doors stood ajar, the maids had disappeared, and the mob had retreated behind the wall. I saw some of the drunken brown faces peer across it as Felipe lifted me on to his horse and mounted behind me "Will they let us get away?" I asked with a new shudder of fear.

"I hope so They believe that I am one of their own officers"

"But you shot one of them"

"Precisely That's why they believe it"

A thin shout came from across the wall "Viva nuestra Virgen de Guadalupe!"

"Viva!" called Felipe, and turned his horse around.

"Death to the Gachupines"

"Death to them!" responded Felipe, and we were crossing the bridge "You see how simple it is?" he said, laughing "They don't even have a password All you have to do is shout with them We shall have to wish death on myself a hundred times before we reach town What a travesty, this insurrection! Are you cold, little one?"

No, I was not cold Wrapped in Felipe's black cloak, I was warm and safe and unspeakably happy once more The years fell away behind me and had never been I could remember nothing, think nothing, I could only feel I could feel his breath warm on my hair in the chilly night, my back leaning against his chest, feel his heart beat against my shoulder, his arms enclose me as he pulled the bridle, he gave the chestnut the spurs and I could feel him dominate his horse and me, his woman, in one and the same motion

It was strange, a flight rather than a ride, through the narrow defile, now under the buttressed walls of other despoiled haciendas, and now across the hills where an unknown number of insurgents were camping in the dark Here and there, over the embers of a small fire, a sleepy voice called out "Viva nuestra Virgen de Guadalupe! Death to the Gachupines!"

"Viva la Virgen! Death to them!"

Once a shot was fired after us, but it went amiss and Felipe laughed "They'd better save their ammunition," he muttered "They haven't much of it"

At last we reached the town, but we did not enter through the guarded toll gate but turned off towards the dark bulk of the Hacienda de Dolores at the foot of Granaditas, where the trenches began and the sentinels were on the alert Sharp click of a rifle Acrid smell of a soldier Impersonal voice in the dark

"Halt Who goes there?"

"Good friend Castile and León for ever"

"For ever Pass"

No lights, no fire, here and there the glow of a cigarrillo The monotonous, ever-repeated call of the sentinels, invisible behind breastworks and in ditches

Sentinel alert—sentinel alert—sentinel alert

Echo after echo, along the entrenchments, up the sloping lane of Mendizabal, past a muffled, molelike activity where small men were walling up one of the two powerful doors of

the looming edifice Two guards were crossing their bayonets in front of the main gate, where the password was different

"Halt Who goes there ?"

"Good friend Victory or death "

"You may pass "

The bayonets were withdrawn Felipe lifted me off the horse, which was led away into the dark A tiny ocote flame was kindled and held up to Felipe's face "Qué tal, Felipe ? What did you find out ? How goes it outside ?" a young lieutenant asked, he had a round, childish face, his eyes were bright with excitement

"Pues—regular A few drunken Indios along the Marfil highway No news, Pepito "

"And whom are you bringing us here ?"

"We haven't enough women—"

"Never, hombre, never enough "

"—to prepare the tortilla for the troops," Felipe concluded The lieutenant laughed and blew out the little flame "I am at your feet, señorita You may pass," he said The tall, foreboding, iron-studded door was slowly shoved open, barely wide enough to let us enter

I was on the other side of the lines

I had stepped from one world into another For almost two years I had been an interested, sympathetic well-wisher on the periphery of conspiracy, a convinced and eager partisan, if not a fighter, of the insurrection But during the last few hours I had met face to face some of the insurgents and I was still trembling with the experience What did these people know or think or understand of human rights and liberty , what of the obligation which freedom imposes upon the free ? What they understood was the freedom of hatred, the freedom to destroy, kill, smash, wreck everything, senseless as the elements Under their thin crust of Christianity these Indios had remained savages, children of a cruel country where mass murder had been a religious cult and whose towns had been reeking of the blood and rotting skeletons of human sacrifice Death to the Spaniards, who had not tried to lift them up, enlighten them, to lead them wisely by kindness and good example, death to the Spaniards, death !

But when the gate of Granaditas opened and I stepped across into the world of these despised Spaniards, I could not help

letting compassion and, yes, even admiration reach out for my heart They were so pitifully few, so proudly controlled, and so very polite After the uproar from which I had escaped by the breadth of a hair, it seemed unbelievably quiet here Our steps echoed under the high vaulted ceiling as we walked down the wide, noble sweep of a stairway sparsely lit by a single lantern On the steps men were sleeping, dark bundles wrapped in their cloaks and flung down by their exhaustion In a corner a group was awake, talking under their breaths so as not to disturb the sleepers Most of the men had grown a week's beard, like Felipe, and somehow it moved me to see him and his elegant friends of better days so badly groomed Their conversation stopped when we passed, and one or two of them recognized me and greeted me in the grand manner "At your feet, Doña Clara, at your orders"

We descended into the patio, which had the grandeur and simplicity of a Greek temple Under the arcades more men were sleeping and a few others, the sleepless ones, were pacing up and down the length of the court, up and down, restless shadows in the dim night which might be their last One of them joined us as we crossed the patio, it was Andreas Ruiz, utterly sober and in a deep gloom "Good evening, Doña Clara," he said perfunctorily, and grabbed Felipe's arm "You were outside?" he said "What do you think? How do matters stand?" There was about him the stale smell of a man who has not washed nor come out of his clothes for several days "Hombre," Felipe said, "don't worry yourself crazy Matters stand perfectly well You are as safe here as in your mother's lap, as safe as every little peso of the royal treasury"

"There is some talk that Hidalgo has eighty thousand men massed against us," Ruiz said frettingly

"Eighty thousand asses' behinds! There is always some talk where old women get together Eighty thousand men with four rifles among them! There are no eighty thousand men in the entire province Be reasonable, Andreas, pray"

"Let them be fifty thousand Let them be twenty thousand How many of us are there? Five hundred? Six hundred at the utmost Which one of us is unreasonable?"

"Six hundred men in a redoubtable fortress and, I hope, not a single coward among us," Felipe said coldly "Cortéz conquered Mexico with less"

He pulled me along, and Andreas Ruiz remembered a

moment too late to make his bow to me I looked up into the sky and saw that guards were posted at close intervals on the flat roof Only their shoulders and the barrels of their rifles stood out over the parapet up there Neither Felipe nor Ruiz had a rifle, but I noticed that both wore the fantastic uniform in which they had celebrated the forsaken proclamation of King Fernando, and with a small pang I also recognized Felipe's dress sword Now we were under the arcades, passing door after door Felipe tried to open one after the other, but they were all locked "Are you tired, Caralinda?" he asked over his shoulder as I was obediently trotting along "I shall put you to bed soon All these rooms are filled to the ceiling with silver bars and similar stuff, hard to sleep on I'll find you a better place"

One of the doors stood ajar and there was light inside "May one enter?" Felipe asked politely, it was the only spot where there were light and noise and activity I remained on the threshold and looked with faint curiosity upon the scene inside About twelve soldiers were busily filing and drilling away on bulky iron quicksilver flasks, others were stacking them up in pyramids against the wall A young officer was supervising them, examining every one of the odd objects before they were put away "Do you really think that they will function, Lieutenant Riaño?" Felipe asked The Intendant's son gave him a preoccupied smile "I wouldn't advise you to lay a wager against them," he answered with a little laugh He had a keen face, fierce black eyes which were brilliant like those of a child who has stayed up too late in the excitement of a holiday He picked up one of the flasks, fondled it for a moment in his grimy hands, and showed it to Felipe "Here," he said "The wick goes in through this little eye—no fuse, you understand, just a wick You light the wick and throw the grenade I promise you that one of these will kill a thousand insurgents—and by tomorrow we shall have five hundred grenades It won't take half as many to rout the curate's rabble"

"Formidable," Felipe said happily "I declare, you are a greater military genius than Bonaparte Will our company receive some of them? And will you show me how to throw them well?"

"Hand grenades," Felipe said as we went on "No deadlier weapon has been conceived since the invention of powder"

"But what did they do with the mercury?"

Felipe only shrugged, it was a gesture he had acquired in the bad years "Who cares, Hijita?" he said "Who cares about mercury now?"

Up another stair at the other end of the patio, and on the upper floor we came to a tall ornate door guarded by two sentinels at arms Felipe muttered his name and they let us enter We were in a large high-ceilinged room, an assembly hall, it seemed, dominated by a hugely glorified portrait of Fernando VII Under the painting a few banners and standards, furled and unassuming, were leaning against the wall The room was well lit by several large lanterns, and here and there small groups of men were crowding around candle-lights At a table of imposing size the Intendant Riaño was bent over maps and papers and fitfully dictating a letter to a bespectacled secretary Behind him hovered his aide, and by his side stood the Intendant's assistant, Licenciado Valdez, a gangling man whose thin wrists stuck out of the somewhat too short sleeves of his uniform This, then, was the headquarters of the Loyalists

"Will you dispense with me for a moment, Caralinda? I have to make my report," Felipe said, and left me standing there, with my sandals and apron, and with Loro asleep on top of my basket I looked around for faces I had known in years past Even here a few men had rolled up to sleep, in a corner, on a mat spread on the floor, some were throwing dice like cargadores on the street I recognized the Major Berzábal, the commander of the garrison, he was sitting apart from the others, with a portfolio on his knees, and writing a letter There was a desperate loneliness about him, as though he had withdrawn into himself to commune with someone dear and absent who probably would never receive this letter On a window bench, in the light of a candle stuck into an empty bottle, two grey-haired men were uncomfortably playing chess on the board between them The one with the soft double chin and the black soutane I remembered to have seen in the Church of the Compañía The other, when he lifted his face from the chessmen and recognized me, gave a little gasp It was Don Lorenzo de Lara, grey, wizened, wise, and detached, as only those are detached who have nothing left to lose, to hope for, or to suffer He put down his pawn and raised his arm in the mock salute of a Roman gladiator "Morituri te salutant," he said with a smile

"Don Lorenzo," I said, and, putting down my basket, I went quickly over to him "You? It is a surprise to find you here, of all places"

"Where else could you expect me to be? With the illiterati? Reading Calderón to the Chichimecas? Unfortunately my knowledge of Indian dialects is singularly insufficient. Also, I am a Spaniard, and this here, after all, is Spain. What's left of it in the Americas?"

"I remember some of our conversations——"

"Yes, I remember them also, Doña Clara. But to know is one thing and to act is another. To understand both, the cause and the effect, the pro and contra, is greatly debilitating. A mind like mine is like a boat manned by two crews, one rowing south, the other north. You never reach port."

The padre had moved his bishop and looked up with a connoisseur's smile "Well put, Don Lorenzo, very well put," he pronounced. I remembered then his name, Don Eusebio Avila, whom the Inquisition had denounced for liberal and dangerous thinking.

"In our spastic world this is a very comfortable corner," Don Lorenzo said. "No decisions are demanded of us any longer, morally or otherwise." He pointed with an ironical, ink-stained finger up, towards the ceiling or the sky "Decisions will be made for us by higher authority. Tomorrow we shall either live or die. How very simple and relaxing. For an old man like me the difference is negligible. But you, Doña Clara, why are you here?"

I saw Felipe approach us "My reason is so unreasonable that only a woman could understand it," I answered. Felipe exchanged greetings with the chess players and led me towards the commanding table in the centre.

The Intendant seemed smaller than ever before, but this was what one thought every time one encountered him. His uniform was unbuttoned at the high collar, his thin hair dishevelled. His eyelids were inflamed and swollen for lack of sleep, and the trembling of the sheet he was holding before his eyes emphasized the shaking of his hand. Altogether he was a pitiful sight, he did not look like a commander before the deciding battle, but like a man who had been tormented by a toothache for several nights and had at last come to the desperate resolution to have the bad tooth pulled.

"Your Excellency," said Felipe "With your permission, Your Excellency——"

"Yes, yes, what is it? Ah, Señor Contreras, isn't it? About this matter of fodder for the horses——"

"With your permission, no, Your Excellency It is about——"

"I am tired," the Intendant said petulantly "I have not slept for three nights I have not been out of my clothes for a week I had no time to be shaved We are short of ammunition Don't bother me with details If it is about the mercury——"

"Permit me the liberty of presenting to you Doña Clara, who has agreed to supervise the women in the kitchen," Felipe said quickly

"Ah yes, indeed I kiss your hands, Doña Clara You are a gallant lady, Doña Clara, and I shall not fail to mention your gallantry to the Virrey"

The Intendant was visibly cheered as he proceeded to give me housewifely orders "Yes, Your Excellency," I said, "I understand, Your Excellency I shall duly observe your orders, Your Excellency" But this is absurd, I thought at the same time What am I doing here? How did I get myself into being made a sutler-woman and a heroine on the Loyalist side? And Bert Quaile arrested It did not trouble me greatly I could never be Quaile's wife, never, I knew it now Mrs Bert Quaile of Pittsburgh? Never All that had been wiped out at the moment Felipe had lifted me in his arms and carried me across the threshold, across the Indio he had shot For me the high peaks and the deep ravines, but not the tepid, respectable life No, I did not worry about Quaile The first thing Hidalgo did in every town was to open the jail and free the prisoners In the meantime, Quaile was probably much safer behind bars than on the street

"I expect everyone to do his duty to the last," finished the Intendant

"Yes, Your Excellency"

"Licenciado Valdez, kindly hand the lady the key to Number 19, or was it Number 16 where the provisions for the troops are stored?"

"Number 21, Your Excellency"

"Ah yes You are to relieve Don Castillo at three in the morning, Señor Contreras"

"At your orders, Your Excellency"

Felipe indicated a sloppy salute and led me away Silently we went up another flight of stairs, the air was wet and cool, a procession of neat small clouds was marching across the sky above the patio The night was liquid, translucent, pregnant Felipe stopped in front of one of the many tall, numbered doors and turned the heavy key in the lock The door swung open and he stepped aside and let me enter "Can you see enough or shall I try to hunt up a candle?" he asked, by his voice I could hear that his chest was as taut as mine I was testing the fresh, full, rustic odour of that room Grain Mounds, hills, mountains of grain The barn in Helgenhausen, silky whisper of oats, slant of sun in the loft, cooling summer joy of a childhood day

I felt grain under my steps, it trickled cool and pebbly into my sandals "I can see enough," I said My eyes were getting used to the liquid luminescence about us which came flowing in through the windows high in the wall Grain was piled up almost to the ceiling and softly sloping towards the floor I had been a child, I had rolled in such hills of grain, played hide-and-seek in them with Babette I turned round to Felipe, he stood stiffly, darkly, against the paleness of the grain Only his face had some light on it, above the shadow of his young crusader's beard "I can see you," I whispered

"I can see you too, Caralinda"

He closed the door and locked it from the inside "Come, let me make you a bed, Hijita," he said Cautiously I put down the basket with my white Sunday clothes I hoped Loro would not wake up and make an indiscreet remark Felipe took off his black cloak and spread it carefully over the grain, patting and moulding the corn to receive me "Now lie down and tell me whether it is comfortable"

"I never slept in a better bed," I said

"Except the one of Madame Pompadour," he said insolently "In Vera Cruz Remember?"

"No I remember nothing Nothing"

He slipped off his coat and covered me with it He had three pistols in his belt, two of his own and mine He carried them into the corner next to the door and prudently put them down "There goes the artillery," he said, trying to cover the strange throbbing shyness between us with a little jest I heard him unbuckle his belt and take off his sword Ten years of my life, all of my life, were contained in those small sounds I knew so

well He stood for a moment over me, very tall and stretched
“Good night, dear heart May you rest well,” he said softly I
heard the grain whisper as he made a bed for himself, away
from me

From the trenches down there, as from a very great distance,
came call and answer and echo of the sentinels

“León and Castile for ever ”
For ever
“Victory or death ”
Victory—victory—or death——

And, fading away

—death—death

I closed my eyes I am in Granaditas I am with Felipe
But this is all wrong No, it is not This is as it must be I
have been split in half and now I am whole again I have been
dead and now I am alive A blue sky was not blue, a red
carnation not red, not really red for me without Felipe I
buried my hand in the grain I could feel the shape and texture
of every single grain with a tactile intensity and gladness
which I had almost forgotten I let the corn trickle through
my craving fingers, tomorrow silvery powder would cling to
my skin I heard Felipe over there breathe carefully so as
not to betray whatever turmoil might cramp his chest Then he
stirred and his hand came across the pale dunes to meet mine
The moment our fingers touched they were locked into each
other like two links of a metal chain at white heat

“Clarinda ?” he said, he was lying on his back, rigid, his
arms flung out, and I could tell that he was smiling

“Yes, Felipe ?”

“Yes ?”

“Yes Oh yes ”

“Condesa Clarinda,” he said, still away from me and only
our hands together, “Clarinda it is only five minutes since I
met you first”

“Yes, Felipe I know ”

“Caralinda—there is only this Now No yesterday No
tomorrow Only tonight Now Now and until three in the
morning ”

"Now and always, Felipe"

He pulled me to him and took my face between his hands searching for my eyes in the liquid darkness "Caralinda," he said "Always is but a word I might not live another night Now I live"

I gave no answer and he laughed angrily "Don't make me talk rot like Andreas Ruiz," he said "I was only joking You know that I was only joking I will live to be eighty like all the Fuentes men, and I shall be baldheaded and without teeth and with much gout and totally impotent, but still in love with you still and ever in love"

The clock of the Church of Belén struck midnight, my heart raced ahead of every beat, now, and only now, only this night these three hours and nothing beyond

"Will you come once more up to the top of Orizaba with me ?" Felipe asked almost inaudibly as he carried me out of my self and into the endlessness of our last embrace

September 28, 1810 It was a Friday, but for some reason it seemed like Sunday all morning long Perhaps because the air was so light and clear after a little shower had washed it clean at dawn Perhaps because the day had commenced with services and prayers in the patio, where a simple little altar had been improvised It had been a far cry from the churrigueresque pomp of the fashionable Spanish churches and there was something deeply serious and moving, some thing of the integrity of the first Christians, about these men as they knelt before a crudely carved cross and received the benediction and absolution of their religion which assured them everlasting salvation Or perhaps it felt like Sunday because the leisurely sounds of Sunday were all about in the streets of this neighbourhood which I knew so well And it felt like Sunday, because all seemed cheerful and everyone commented on the lovely weather and the nice air and the friendliness of the sun, and a few officers came to me to express their own and their company's appreciation of the breakfast we had promptly dispatched And because I wore white silk stockings and my new shoes with the silver buckles and my white dress with the cerise sash and even my bonnet with the cherry cluster But most of all it was Sunday because somewhere in this crowd, in this vast building, I knew Felipe was near me

The women in the large kitchen sang and giggled and smoked and patted the tortillas and ground the corn and flirted with the soldiers going to and fro and made a little fiesta of it altogether. As the morning drew on it became more and more of a holiday, on the crests and slopes of the hills, on the Cerro del Cuarto and San Miguel, people and more people appeared, they wore their Sunday clothes and they seemed in a fine, expectant mood, as if they had come early enough to find good seats at a bullfight, but Granaditas, in the centre of the high, green galleries, was the arena. Compact lines of miners arrived up there, some carried wineskins or coloured fibre bags with food, and crocks and bottles, and one or two of the ever-present little music bands were thinly and merrily playing the songs of the streets. From the kitchen we could not see much of all this because there was no window, only a round opening high up in the wall through which the smoke of our charcoal fires might escape. But my brigade of women had leaned a ladder against that wall and one or the other was always climbing up there to report to the rest of us what was happening in the world outside. Also, there was a constant running out into the patio and to the large cistern for water and returning with little odds and ends of information. Most of my girls were the wives or sweethearts of soldiers, had been cooking for their men in the barracks and camps, and they were a gay, insouciant crowd. In this kitchen the problem of Mexico's independence appeared as removed as the Milky Way. We even had a few children there infants wrapped in their mothers' shawls and asleep in some empty crate or basket, or, at intervals, pressed to a rich brown breast for nourishment. There was also a little guest about whom the girls fell into fits of laughter because he was Italian and spoke with an accent, a droll, lively, cherry-eyed little fellow with the fierce gestures of an operatic tenor and the padding toe-over-toe walk of a hedgehog. He and Loro had become friends at once and the two together were as good as a circus. Little Rinaldino had helped me convert my empty basket into a cage for Loro.

"My father promised me a pony of my own if I don't cry and—a bag of caramel that big, and—and a pair of silver spurs with my own name on them, real spurs, and—and—Can your parrot speak Italian, señorita?"

"No, you had better teach him. Teach him to call you Rinaldino. Where is your father?"

"Oh, up there, somewhere, with the soldiers. But my father is no soldier. My father is rich. You should see my father's shop in Guadalajara, señorita. When we go back to Guadalajara, my father says, he will be twice as rich yet, my father will be so rich, he will buy me a pony—"

I had my hand in the thick, warm, curly hair of the little boy when Felipe drifted into the kitchen, and my heart leaped like a mountain goat "May one have a drink of water?" he asked, and I quickly dipped a gourdful for him and held it up while his eyes locked themselves into mine as if never to let go "The commander of our volunteers' company, Don Castillo, wishes a word with you, Doña Clara," he said when he had drunk, and I felt that all twenty-four women in the kitchen were divining our secret of the past night. Felipe walked across the room and inspected it "Where does this door lead to?" he asked, pointing to an iron ring in the floor which I had not noticed before. A woman came forward to answer, she was by far the oldest of the lot, perhaps not the wife but the mother of a soldier. She had a wide-browed face of the static beauty often found among the simple Mexicans and she wore her hair like a crown "It passes the cemetery and goes down to the Río Cata, señor," she said politely "To wash our clothes there and ourselves, also not to soil the kitchen when we kill the fowl for the tables of the señores officers."

"How do you call yourself?"

"María Filipina Dominguez, at your orders, señor."

"Good. Listen, María, you know your way about in this district? If there—if there should arise an emergency, you understand, if we men should be too preoccupied to command you what to do—you understand?"

"How should I not understand, señor?"

"In that case you women are to leave through this exit. It is the lowest part of Granaditas, isn't it? All you women are to leave, all of you, do you understand? Doña Clara—and that means you too. These are my orders."

"Thus it shall be, señor," said María "In an emergency, the Brothers of Belén may give us refuge in their hospital," she said, and I saw suddenly that she had thought about this before and that she was aware of the danger, but not afraid of it. Felipe dropped some coins into her hand, gave me a slight sign to follow him, and we left the kitchen.

"Good day, my heart," he said, "and a very, very good day to you in your white bridal gown"

"Good day, Felipe It is like Sunday, isn't it?"

"It is like Sunday in Paradise It is like living on a rainbow Don't you want to swallow the sky and bite into the green of the hills? Come, let me take you up to the roof and show you the world"

"You sound like Satan in the Bible ' and the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,'" I said, and I could not help laughing

"I don't want you to remember Roberto now," he said with that uncanny ear for the finest unconscious overtones that always surprised me anew

"I hope he will be all right, Poor Robert," I said Poor Albert, I had said long ago Now it was Poor Robert. Worthless me, faithless me, headless me, happy, happy, happy me We had reached the roof, a wide expanse, flat as a drill ground, washed with the cool gold of the morning sun

"This dawn, while I stood watch," Felipe said, "I had time to think I made plans for us, very sensible plans, but very wonderful plans That's why I am so happy, I believe These last years, Caralinda, they were a harsh purgative, but now I am cleaned out I have thrown that fool Felipe Contreras into the deepest pit. Last night, oh, Caralinda, my only one, last night was the beginning of a new life I am only one day old and I shall need you for support, all you eleven thousand Virgens of Santa Ursula, how I shall need you! After this today—after we have stopped this silly riot—we shall leave Guanaxuato at once We shall leave New Spain even if every inch of ground were made of pure gold We shall go to the Peninsula, you have never been in Spain, you have a great treat in store We shall live in some small town, or in a village, or in Valencia if you like, and we shall live very simply and quietly in a little house, and I shall bring you every evening the money I earned during the day, you would like that, wouldn't you?"

I swallowed, because this eternally foolish lover of mine sounded so much like little Rinaldino in the kitchen

"What will you do to earn money, my love?"

"Oh, I planned it all I shall be a scribe under the portales I learned to write a most artful hand in San Esteban, and all the people will ask me to write letters for them, love letters, don't

you think I could write good love letters ? I shall write letters which would seduce a saint, and for three pesetas I should write a letter to make a wife forgive even the most faithless husband In Valencia, which is a town of great passions, I could easily earn twenty and thirty pesetas a day that way, and that's better than throwing hundreds of thousands into the bottomless waters of a drowned shaft " He meditated silently for a little while and then he added hopefully " I could also become a fisherman in Cullera, if you would prefer that "

" It would be lovely, Felipe Except that Spain is invaded and at war "

" Of course Clearly, I should first fight for my country until the French and the English are driven off and our King returns to Madrid," he said, and with a flip of his long fingers he threw all of Napoleon's might and Europe's strife over the parapet. Two grenadiers with cocked bayonets and high shakos had marched past us at regular intervals, and more guards were posted at every corner of the roof, some of them soldiers of the regular troops, and a few volunteers who, like Felipe, were trying in dress and manner to give themselves a military air

Looking around with curiosity, I absorbed the enormous view from this roof The amphitheatre of hills and mountains, the flat-roofed strata of houses and hovels, the spikes of towers and domes of churches And at the foot of Granaditas the pattern of trenches, breastworks, and defences which surrounded the citadel of grain They were sparsely manned with toy soldiers, grenadiers, and a sprinkle of volunteers There was something greatly reassuring in the lazy, leisurely way the soldiers were leaning with their backs against the walls of the trenches—smoking, throwing dice, or just dozing When Felipe handed me a spyglass I could see them clearly A few had taken off their boots and were curling their brown, broad peasant toes in the sunshine A few had put their heads together and were singing, harmonizing with the serious deliberation of men rehearsing for a serenade Most of the soldiers were very young and they did not look either strong or healthy, probably they had been ill-fed until the day when they had entered or had been pressed into the service Their faces were the faces of the street, of the poor districts, of the humble people broad cheeks, large sleepy eyes which, however, might catch fire at the sight of a skirt The same faces as those of our workers in the hacienda, of the miners, and of the

insurgents who had come across the bridge yesterday and wrecked Mingo Creek. Suddenly I was overcome by the senselessness, the futility, the absurdity of the situation. The insurgents were fighting against the Spaniards, why should these soldiers fight *for them*? Was it possible that the handful of obstinate and desperately brave Loyalists in this fortress could make Mexican fight against Mexican?

Nonsense and rubbish, I thought. Let the insurgents come. They will shake hands with their brother soldiers and fall around each other's neck and rub noses, and Señor Riaño will be glad to hand his sword to his friend Hidalgo and be rid of all further responsibility. It was a cheerful and pleasant thought, and it was what Bert Quaile had preached all along. A small flight of white pigeons alighted on the roof and crowded jerkily into a low wooden dove-cote. This, more than anything, seemed to assure me that there would be no fight. Certainly there would be no fight. For all the grenadiers and their bayonets, one did not build dovecotes on a battlefield.

"Felipe," I said, "why are we here? What is all this? Why don't we go away? We are not prisoners, the gate is not locked."

"Why? But, Caralinda—and you may call me a coward because this is the only place where we are safe."

He took the spyglass from me and scanned the hillside. By now a multitude of people had collected there, crouching, eating, drinking, staring, waiting. "I'll tell you something and, please, don't let it frighten you," Felipe went on. "Some seventy or eighty Europeans chose to leave the town during the last days. This morning we received the disgraceful information that all but eight or nine of them have been seized and killed by the insurgents. Do not ask me why we must stay where we are, I thank God on my knees that I was able to bring you into safety."

"But, Felipe," I said, "I don't understand it. How many people live in Guanajuato? Sixty thousand? How many Spaniards are here in Granaditas? Not two hundred. Did it never occur to you that the Mexicans might have a right to govern Mexico?"

"You made the acquaintance of a few true Mexicans yesterday, would you like to be governed by them?"

"I would rather be governed by Father Hidalgo than by a Virrey of Iturrigaray's sort. There are more men of high

qualities in Mexico, many more, than it takes to govern a country Does not this stubborn resistance against the independence of Mexico seem stupid to you, and unjust, and senseless ?”

Felipe waited with his answer He searched for my hand on the parapet and held it tightly “Probably, if I were a Mexican, it would seem thus to me But I am born a Spaniard and I have to die a Spaniard ”

“Let me put it differently then, dear heart Does it seem worth dying for ?”

Felipe smiled down at me, as men are forever smiling down on those childish, pleasurable creatures women “Don’t let’s quibble, little one,” he said, taking my hand and kissing it artfully, the back, the palm, the wrist and the tip of each finger “There is such a thing as honour Honour is the one thing that’s worth dying for , because life without honour wouldn’t be worth yesterday’s stale tortilla Look at that sky, do me a favour and look at that sky , have you ever seen a sky as beautiful as today’s sky ? Tonight I shall carry you off on a big black horse with big black wings and together we shall ride up into that sky——”

One can’t reason with him, I thought, one can only love this illogical stranger , and then I went down to the kitchen to supervise the preparation of the frijoles for the noonday meal

Nothing happened until eleven o’clock, when two horsemen in vaguely military outfits arrived at the entrance of the town and demanded to be led before the Intendant to hand him a message from the General Commander of the Americas, Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla Lieutenant Riaño, the Intendant’s fiery and gifted son, who stood with his company in the outer defences, received the messengers with rigid politeness, had them blindfolded and brought through the lines Then there was an interim of a silence so deep it made even the women in the kitchen stop their chatter A perspiring orderly rushed in and demanded that a table be prepared in the hall and that food and wine of the best be sent up, because the two emissaries were to be treated and honoured as the Intendant’s guests At the same moment the bugles were blowing from all sides, and there was a hasty rush and tramping of soldiers’ boots across the patio, a clanking of swords and sabres up the stairs, a strident criss-cross of commanding voices and trumpet signals, and an officer running past the open kitchen door was calling

out "Everybody to the roof, all men assemble in formation, on the roof, everybody to the roof!"

I decided to interpret this as a personal invitation, and when the noise and clatter had faded away towards the top of the stairs I trailed prudently after the men and hid behind the dovecote. Now that the entire force of Granaditas was crowded into the limited space of the roof, they looked like a fairly respectable number. On one side the regular troops were lined up, opposite the straggling company of volunteers, dribbling off in a residue of a few black soutanes, a few elderly civilians, merchants, and outsiders of Don Lorenzo's kind. Two buglers were heralding the Intendant, who, followed by his son and his aide, appeared on the roof. He blinked with his sleepless, swollen eyes against the sun and pushed his hat forward to shade his face. He was tightly buttoned into the Spanish black, red, and gold of his uniform and he came forward with the stiff gait of an old officer long out of service. Facing the scanty line of volunteers, he cleared his throat, fumbled for a sheet of paper his aide held out for him, and began to speak.

"I have to inform you of a communication I received from the curate of Dolores, Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, which I shall proceed to read to you," he announced, and, holding the letter in his shaking hand before his inflamed eyes, he read the message. I could hear only fragments of it because the doves were cooing in their little house, the clock of Belén slowly struck eleven, and in a cantina a music band was playing. But I understood that Hidalgo had been acclaimed the General Commander of the Americas and had been given the authority to declare the independence of Mexico. That it was deemed necessary to remove temporarily such Europeos as represented an obstacle to the independence, that their property would be confiscated and that they would be confined. That, however, they would be treated with all honours and that all possible comfort would be given to them until such time when they might choose either to return to Spain or to be instated as citizens of Mexico. It was a letter of great moderation, courtesy, consideration, even warmth. "If, however," the letter went on to declare with paternal strictness, "if, however, resistance were offered, I shall direct all my forces against you and destroy you."

The Intendant's voice had gained volume and the end of the letter rang out loudly and clearly across the roof, I listened

intently because in that ending was all of Spain the faith, the pride, and that peculiar Spanish *cortesia* which is something else and something more than other nations' courtesy " that God may protect you very much, thus wishes Your Grace, your obedient servant Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, Capitán General of America "

When the Intendant had finished, a deep silence fell over the roof From behind the shamelessly cooing dovecote I tried to catch a glimpse of Felipe Like an officer at a troop inspection, he was standing before the twelve men under his command, he looked neither tense nor anxious, rather slightly bored His left hand rested on the pommel of his sword, and only when his right hand stole up to his scapulary and stopped midway as he remembered his military coat and stance did I perceive how much of his boredom was mere bravado The silence stretched on and on until the Intendant broke it with a voice which was precariously trembling on the edge of a sob "I don't want to conceal from you," he said, trying hard to gain control of himself, "that I also received a personal and confidential letter from the curate of Dolores in which he assures me of his undiminished esteem in spite of the divergence in our way of thinking He says here ' if you decide that we shall fight as enemies, I offer your family a safe asylum, and you ought to consider this not as a sign of weakness but as a consideration which I am unable to forgo That God may protect you many years ' Well, and so on and so on "

Still the silence It was uncanny to listen to the complete silence of five hundred men "Señores," said the Intendant, and I wondered why I had always thought him a small man or what it was that made him appear tall at this moment, "señores, you have heard what the curate of Dolores has to say He has many men, I don't know how many Neither do I know whether he has any artillery If so, it would make any defence of Granaditas impossible As for myself, I have no fear and I am ready to give my life, with you and for you But I don't want you to believe that I intend to sacrifice you to my personal ideals You give me your resolution and I shall follow it out "

The silence grew denser , it contracted like a giant's muscle It seemed so simple, so easy to answer Hidalgo's offer , he had left all doors wide open for the Spaniards and their unresilient pride I held my breath until the blood roared in my ears It

was a dizzy moment, as if God were balancing and spinning the globe on a tip of His finger, as a juggler spins a golden ball But this was not the globe, only a pinprick on it on the spinning globe a continent, in the continent a stretch of land, in a narrow fold of that land a town, in that town a granary, and on the roof of that granary a thin huddle of men bracing themselves for a fatal decision I looked at the faces of the men some had turned pale, some flushed, some were strained, some serious and pensive, some stupid, some sneering O God, let them be generous, and if not generous, then just, and if not just, then at least reasonable What did Spain mean to them, a country they had left many years ago and which was no longer the same country they remembered? What of their phantom King of whom they knew less than nothing? I was sure that at that moment they did not even think of their personal gain or, less, their positions, their property, Perhaps it takes more courage for a man to step up, singly and for himself, in front of the many, to say aloud "Let's give in I want to live We all want to live"—than to drift with the current into war and battle where no one is alone Perhaps there is always, between today's peace and tomorrow's revolution, war, and slaughter, such one single dizzy moment when the fate of a world hangs suspended and no one dares to speak the redeeming, sober, sensible word which might be mistaken for weakness and fear, and which yet would be more valiant than all the valour decorated—or killed—on the battlefields

At last the silence snapped and Señor Castillo, the commander of the volunteers, stepped forward He was a somewhat older, somewhat heavier man than most members of his corps, and he appeared very indignant He appeared like a man whose face has been slapped for no good reason, and his great anger and indignation choked his voice and flushed his cheeks

"I haven't committed any crime," he said loudly and gruffly, "and I can't see why I should let myself be arrested and my property taken from me" He seemed to notice that this was inadequate and he groped for words suitable to the solemnity of the occasion Señor Castillo, obviously, was not much of an orator, and, lifting his voice above the level of a merely personal grouch, he took refuge in the nearest, the most shopworn catchword that came to his mind "No, señores, no surrender!" he shouted "To conquer or to die!"

The response was inevitable "To conquer or to die, no surrender, victory or death, Castile and León for ever" It rose in thin shouts from the line of volunteers Felipe seemed to feel the need of a great gesture and drew his sword, flourishing it in the clear air, a few others followed his example and a certain sweep and lustre entered into the formality Andreas Ruiz was shouting louder than the others, probably because he was more afraid than they Don Lorenzo had not joined the chorus but was observing the ceremony with the faint and amused curiosity of a disinterested spectator Turning towards the other side of the roof, the Intendant called out to the regular troops "And you, my children? I do not doubt that you will do your duty!" At this Major Berzábal promptly drew his sword and, wearing his loneliness like a mask, he called with military discipline "Viva el Rey!" It sounded harsh, like a command at the drill grounds, and in well-trained unison the soldiers repeated, "Viva el Rey!"

It seemed as if the decision they had made, or rather that had imposed itself upon them, had filled them with a new elation Commands rang out, salutes were exchanged, shoulders patted, the swords returned into the scabbards, and the common soldiers were marched off towards the stairs Now that there was nothing more to do but to fight and, probably, to die, the Intendant was not fretting and fussing any longer He gave orders without hesitation, quietly, casually, with a dignified serenity which gave reassurance to all Granaditas Cowering in my hiding-place, I saw the Intendant as he put his hand on his son's shoulder in passing, the lieutenant saluted and Riafio went on

"What are you doing here, mujer?" Felipe said, posting himself between me and a small contingent of men who were being deployed over the roof "I was mortified when I saw you hiding there Go thee to thy kitchen, woman, that's where thou belongest Go, and quickly, before you make an embarrassment for me"

"And you? Where will you be?"

"I'm to remain on the roof with my detachment"

"Hasta luego?" I asked

"Hasta luego, Hijita That God be with you And that thou obeyest my orders"

We were both smiling, and this was saying farewell and we did not know whether we would ever see each other again

"Are you kissing me?" I asked across the quivering expanse of air between us

"Yes, I'm kissing you, but go, go thee to thy kitchen, mujer," he said, urgent yet absent, he had already retired into his man's citadel and pulled up the drawbridge

Nothing happened until shortly before two o'clock, when the insurgent army reached the entrance of the town, a slow, mud-coloured, turgid, shuffling flow of men moving in a thick fog of the dust their feet were stirring up. I saw them from my kitchen lookout, and there was no end to them, as there is no end to a river. They had no faces, there were too many of them. In the fog above them moved darkly their mad assortment of arms sticks and shovels and iron bars, and, as on a river's surface hit by the sun, there flitted here and there some spark of brightness a machete, a spear, an axe. Slowly the sticky flow of men congealed. Then, at a command I could not hear, they broke into a savage cry and rush and hurled themselves against the outer ditches of our defences. There came the precise unison of a salvo, and another one, and the first rows of the insurgents fell to the ground. It still did not look as though these were human beings, hundreds of men killed in the very first attack. It looked more like the initial swathe a scythe cuts into a field of oats. Another, wilder, outcry, and the ones farther back turned heel and fled, crashing against the slowly advancing, the irresistible pressure of the thousands and ten thousands and twenty thousands which filled the highway as far as the eye could see. There ensued some confusion in the chaotic mass of the insurgents and some restrained jubilation in the thinly manned but well-disciplined trenches of Granaditas. "Why don't they keep on shooting?" one of my girls asked impatiently. She was sitting on the floor and nursing her little baby boy. "Why don't they kill them all and be done with?"

"They shoot when they're ordered to shoot, silly one," explained Maria. "They're short of ammunition and can't waste powder."

Down beyond the bridge bugles were blowing, and in the dust-covered mass of insurgents a squad of regular troops was swept to the fore boys with the same faces and in the same uniforms as those who were to defend Granaditas. But in a clash, who could ever distinguish friend from foe? Who could prevent our soldiers from deserting, mingling with the insurgents, and vanishing in the deluge? But as I thought, Ours

and Theirs, I felt the same confusion and tangle within myself, I wished the insurgents well, oh, very well indeed. But I did not want Felipe to be killed and I did not want to be killed myself. In fact, I did not wish danger and death on anyone in Granaditas. I knew them too well and, being thrown in with them on that fateful day, I could not help thinking We Ours. The insurgents were a strong multitude and they had good leaders. The men who were making their last stand for the Kingdom of Spain were but a handful and weak and rudderless. And there is this in me and as much a part of me as the nose on my face. I have to take the side of the weaker one. The broken doll, the stray cat, the runt of the litter. Yes, and Felipe. Not for his dash and daring I loved him, but for the crack in the fine vessel and for the fault in the ringing bell and for the stain of his birth and for the tears he had cried into my hair.

No second attack was made on Lieutenant Riaño's trenches, but soon the insurgents found their way through Cata Creek and up to the hillside above Granaditas. This was what the loitering crowds up there had been waiting for since morning to join the insurgents. To storm the granary. But mainly to break into the storerooms and help themselves to the piled-up treasures within these heavy gates. Their minds were not on independence but on loot. The Cerro del Cuarto had come alive with the milling and moving of tiny figures who filled every one of the steep lanes as ants will file through a crack in the wall. A small contingent of dragoons and volunteers which the Intendant had dispatched to the fortified Hacienda Dolores was all but cut off from Granaditas by the interminable flow of insurgents whose number was augmented and multiplied by the influx of the townspeople. The people, but also the mob of Guanaxuato. The loafers, the jailbirds, the beggars, the thieves, the burglars, the pickpockets. The whole greedy refuse and backwash of a greedy town.

"What now, what now, Brother Pepito? What now?" I heard Andreas Ruiz ask the young lieutenant whom I had met at the gate last night. His soldiers were posted inside the heavy gate and he was walking up and down with Ruiz under the arcades of the patio. I had slipped out from the kitchen to look up to the parapet of the roof, where Felipe might possibly be standing. "What now?" Ruiz was fretting. "What are we waiting for? What are they waiting for?"

"Probably for the General Commander of the Americas to arrive," the lieutenant said with a sneer "It is fortunate that the art of strategy and warfare cannot be learned in a little Indian parish How we shall laugh tonight about the blunders of that traitor curate"

"It doesn't take much strategy to understand what Major Berzábal pointed out from the first moment It is impossible to defend Granaditas because it is dominated by hills on all sides Only an imbecile could have chosen the foot of an eminence to build a fortress on——"

He interrupted his glum observation as the imbecile himself, Intendant Riaño, came down the main stairs, his sword clanking on every step, and his staff respectfully following behind "Lieutenant Cortes," said the Intendant, "I am taking reinforcements to position three to relieve the pressure on the Hacienda Dolores You and sixteen men of your company will accompany me"

There were some military doings, commands, more saluting, soldiers arriving at the double and lining up, other soldiers snapping to attention in the doorway as the Intendant walked past Slowly the heavy gate creaked open, outside a little sergeant cracked another command, the sentries stood stiff like tin soldiers, more soldiers snapped to attention, and the Intendant stepped out, with Lieutenant Pepito and his sixteen grenadiers filing in behind him Through the open gate the clear wide daylight entered into the dimness of the archway, and beyond the trenches I caught a swift glance at the little house across the Plazoleta, the house where we had lived through the bad times Its roof seemed crowded with insurgents, its shutters, whose every sound and touch I remembered so well, were drawn close but for a narrow slit that, for some reason, made me think of the narrow slit in the eyes of a cat ready to leap Then the door of Granaditas closed

With most of the men dispatched either to the roof or to the outer defences, the building seemed deserted and very quiet The patio was sharply cut in half by sun and shadow, like a bullfight arena Ten minutes passed since the Intendant had left, as casually as though for a little promenade Then the heavy door was pushed open again and just as casually the Intendant returned He stopped for a moment outside, in the bright, streaming daylight, to give some orders to the eagerly saluting little sergeant

Then the cat leaped

There was an almost imperceptible stir in the slit of that shutter, the crack of a single shot. The Intendant's hand went to his left eye, there was an expression of surprised annoyance on his face, as though a cinder had blown into that eye. The next moment he was rolling down the steps, not like a man but like a sack of flour.

Shouts, cries, commands, consternation, firing from the trenches. Brown hands lifted the felled commander from the ground and handed him to his aide, to Captain Bustamante, who tried in vain to put him on his feet, support him, make him walk. At last the little sergeant dragged the slack body into the building and the door creaked into the lock.

When it was at last understood that the commander of Granaditas was dead, killed by the first shot fired in the fight, there was an outbreak of such turbulent noise, such aimless shouting and rushing hither and yonder, such utter bewilderment, such horrified confusion, such pandemonium, that all duties and necessities of defence were forgotten. Cries for a doctor, a surgeon—but now it turned out that no surgeon was provided for. Cries for a priest, and five of them came rushing forward, too late to save the departed soul. Cries for someone with authority, for a commander, for the next in rank to take over the dead man's responsibilities, but no provision had been made for such an exigency either. The patio resounded with footfalls of men running in all directions, of unbelieving questions and hysterical answers, the gate stood wide open, officers were leaving their posts, and those on the roof bent over the parapet and asked what all the din was about. The dead Intendant was still lying on the stone floor under the shadowy vault of the doorway, and a fine line of blood was running from his left eye, through which the bullet had entered. I saw Major Berzábal come in and kneel down at his side and bend his head in a silent prayer. Summoned from the outer defences, Lieutenant Riaño was the last one to arrive, and at his entrance the hubbub subsided, and someone recovered enough sense to have the gate shut. Young Riaño stood stiffly before the body, as if his high officer's collar and his tight uniform coat prevented him from going to pieces. He lifted his dead father up in his arms and carried him across the entire length of the patio, as though he had no more weight than a child, and laid him gently down on the simple altar under the crude cross. He

closed his father's one staring eye and then he looked round, bewildered, searching for something to cover the other with Padre Eusebio slipped some sacred medal into his hand, and with this he covered the ghastly wound. He kneeled down and kissed his father's hand, as is the Spanish custom, and then he unbuckled the Intendant's sword, laid it on his chest and crossed the dead hands over its handle. Another priest, Padre Septién of the Parroquiál Church, jealous of Padre Eusebio's medal, opened those hands once more to put a small cross into them which he had taken from his own rosary. Young Riaño stepped back and looked round as though he had forgotten something important. His mouth was a thin line of iron as he saluted, turned with military precision, and walked away through the lane which opened up for him and back to the trenches. The priests remained kneeling around the altar, and their monotonous praying formed a pious counterpoint to the raving scandal that followed.

It was a disagreement, a quarrel, and at last an open, vulgar fight between the two pillars on which the tottering power of Spain was propped up—the royal government and the military forces, represented here in the person of Licenciado Valdez on one side and Major Berzábal on the other. The Licenciado was damp-skinned, excited, full of fears, near the breaking point, the major, cold, controlled, cutting, unflinching. "As the Intendant's assistant, I'm next in rank, his death makes me the highest government official and as such I'm taking over the command," cried Valdez, his voice climbing into a shrill falsetto. "I regret to correct you. This is a military post and we are involved in a military action. I am the commander of the troops and of Granaditas," Berzábal retorted with insulting calm. "I'll have you arrested," shrieked the Licenciado. "Try and you'll see whom my troops obey," said the major quietly.

Soon their conflict left the theoretical field and became personal. Insinuations about each other's background, family, colour, and race were hurled across the patio. "Surrender!" cried Valdez. "Give ourselves up, ask for a parley—"

"Too late for that," replied the major. "We are not fighting against soldiers but against a lawless horde of criminals."

"Our lives!" cried Valdez. "Our duty!" said the major. "My family!" cried Valdez. "My honour!" answered Berzábal. By now everybody in the patio began to shout, to take sides, to make suggestions, to give orders, contradict

orders And in all the ugly uproar Riaño was lying on the altar, quiet and well out of it all

"Poor Riaño," said Don Lorenzo at my side "One of the few men of honour and integrity we had But what a failure, what a creator of calamity in everything he touched On his tombstone shall be written 'Virtue is not enough'"

I heard little Rinaldino crying in the kitchen, saw Marfa beckoning to me, and I turned to go back to my duties It was then that the stones began to fall

They came sailing through the air, first only a few, experimental and badly aimed, and then, before anyone clearly knew what was happening, the bombardment was on in its full fury A tempest, a cloudburst, a black, roaring, thundering, murderous hailfall of rocks and stones The men of these hills and mountains and mines had worked with rocks, generations back , they had carried rocks and broken them and blasted them and crushed them, and lived among stones all their lives They had brought them in their pockets and lifted them from the dry river bed, pebbles, rocks, stones, small boulders These were the arms of the unarmed insurgents, this was their ammunition, the deadly primitive weapon of man since man existed Against the unceasing droning and drumming and crashing in which they were bursting upon the roof, the faint crackle of rifles sounded pitifully inadequate, as if children were playing with firecrackers A million stones were aimed at the roof, but some of them missed and crashed into the patio, sweeping everybody into the shelter of the surrounding arcades One large rock, and a second one, hit the altar, and the dead Intendant's sword answered with a high, glassy sound , I saw Captain Bustamante dash out from under the arcades, and he and Padre Eusebio bravely pushed and pulled the altar and its grievous burden under the protecting arches Rocks fell into the large cistern and spattered against the walls, and pieces of the fine Tuscan frieze broke loose and dropped as so many more missiles to the ground

On the roof there was some futile shooting, then part of the parapet gave way, a dark compact mass that crashed to the floor of the patio with a detonation as of a cannon , and before the dust of the smashed plaster and brick had settled, another dark form came hurtling through the air and landed with a soft, terribly mushy sound and had been one of the volunteers in Felipe's group and was now only a bundle of clothes and

broken bones But before I had time to think too much of Felipe up there on that horror of a roof, little Rinaldo, who had been clinging to my skirt, was tearing away from me with small, piercing, Italian shrieks, because he had suddenly perceived that a fat little civilian flung down near the cistern was his father "Papa, my papa, I want to be with my papa," and then, in a burst of long-detained and saved-up sobs "Mama, Mama-cita, where are you? Mamacita, Mama, oh, Mama!" And there was nothing left but to rush out after him into the battering rain before he, too, got hurt Like a peasant woman, I pulled my skirt over my head for protection and I saw in the flick of a feminine second amid all the cataclysm that my white dress was soiled and dirty by now, and then Andreas Ruiz was helping me to drag the little black man, and the crying boy who clung to him, under the arcades Ruiz—I could smell it on his breath and see it in his eyes—had in the meantime drunk enough to be neither gloomy nor afraid any longer Padre Septién came hurriedly over and with the casual expertness of one whose duty and vocation it is to help people in their dying hour, he attended to the Italian merchant But Señor Rinaldo was not dying, thank God With the help of a flask Andreas held to his mouth he came to They sat him on a wooden bench which stood there against the wall and the little boy crept between his knees, his elbows on his father's plump thighs, more curious than frightened by now

The Italian opened his eyes and said severely "I want to go back to Guadalajara At once" Ruiz burst out laughing "Wouldn't we all, brother, wouldn't we all like to go to Guadalajara!" he crowed merrily The Italian was round with flesh all over, he had plump short fingers crowded with rings, and no sooner had he recovered than he began groping in his money belt for a bag in whose complicated black velvet folds he carried his merchandise a profusion of diamonds and rubies he had come to offer to the jewellers of wealthy Guanajuato He was counting his treasures when Don Lorenzo approached us and called me away "It's an entertaining thought that these stones and the ones that little merchant treasures so are of the same family," he said "Stones to buy a woman's virtue Stones for the crowns of kings Stones for men to kill their enemy Stones over our graves Doña Clara, they are bringing the wounded down from the roof Should not something in the order of a lazaret be improvised? And would

you—probably with the help of these girls in the kitchen——”

“Of course, of course,” I said hastily, shrinking away from the thought that Felipe might be one of those they were bringing down “I shall at once Who is to designate a room for it?”

Suddenly the mad drumming on the roof subsided, and then a cry broke loose, a cry of twenty thousand, thirty thousand men, so savage, so inhuman, as though the very hills were shouting their triumph and closing in on Granaditas Andreas Ruiz was running past us “They have driven them from the roof,” he called “Now they’re storming They’re attacking God help us now, God help us all” He stumbled on, his brief flare of courage diluted in too much aguardiente, and I saw him fall down on his knees beside Padre Septién, who solicitously bent his ear to him to receive his confession and give him absolution

There were priests who took charge of the souls and others who cared for the bodies of the wounded and dying Those who raised crosses and gave blessings and benedictions and ministered the last Holy Sacrament and held the doors of eternal salvation open for the faithful And those who found tools and boards and nails and hacked away and made stretchers and splints for the smashed limbs, who carried bleeding men twice their own weight and filled aguardiente into the screaming ones to deaden their pain There was now, everywhere in this last stronghold shaking under the force of assault, a merciless sorting out and a strict assaying Of the useless ones, and of those who were of use Of those who grew quiet and purposeful under stress and strain, and those who broke and went crazy Of the selfish ones, and of those to whom was given the grace of being able to forget themselves in helping others Of the maudlin ones, and of those whose only sign of fear was a tendency to make bad jokes Of those who fought well, and of those others who died all the same and shabbily Of those who were thrashing around and screaming over their injuries, and of those who were quietly, silently bleeding away and only the sweat was streaming, streaming, over their faces, and they called for their mother once and died And I thought of La Rosaura, who had said that no one knew anything about himself or about God before the moment of death

Don Lorenzo was wonderful, into this inferno of fighting

and dying men he brought something for which no one else had the time or talent Tenderness That queer, shameful tenderness he had never been permitted to use, he squandered it now on the young soldiers whom he laid out in the hall which had only last night been Riaño's headquarters Tenderness was in the touch of his soiled, tapering fingers and in the way he supported a boy's head and in the words he spoke to him Where every desperate attempt of our troops to break out of Granaditas failed, Don Lorenzo made three times his way (and I still can't understand how he did it) to the hospital of Belén and returned with bandages and medicines and medical advice The fourth time he did not return and his body has never been found

María was wonderful to the last, and so was Captain Bustamante and a nameless young dragoon who, very late in the fight, came through the lines in a stream of blood, his horse shot from under him, his head a ghastly gash, and with both hands holding his intestines in place, he reported that his squad had gone over to the insurgents and that those volunteers cut off in the Hacienda Dolores had all been slaughtered And he asked for a drink of water, and by the time I held the gourd to his lips he was dead And Major Berzábal was wonderful, and Felipe Felipe was as he had been when I was down with the smallpox, and as in the night when La Ramita caved in and he had saved thirty-four of his workers Yes, in the crucible of Granaditas, in that last strict assay and probe, Felipe was found to contain more of the fine pure metal than most

I saw him twice more during the never-ending afternoon He came into the kitchen where I was busy cutting aprons and towels and empty flour sacks into bandages and cleaning kitchen knives to be used in the lazaret His forehead was bleeding, and I had not known that blood was so bright and that so much of it could gush from a man who was grinning at me with perfect unconcern "I only wanted to inquire about your health, Doña Clara," he said, the blood was streaming over his face and into his beard "What a spectacle that was on the roof! I haven't seen so many things sail through the air since the day El Negrito butchered in the most inept and cowardly manner one of the best bulls there ever was In Madrid it happened, the year before I left Spain You should see the roof, covered with rocks almost to the rim of the parapet May one have a drink of water?"

He rubbed his sleeve over his face, and more blood came spurting from the cut on his forehead "You're bleeding," I said, "you're—"

"Am I ?" he said, surprised, and examined his head and the sticky smear on his sleeve "By the life of the holy martyrs, I am I thought I was only sweating "

"Let me wash it out for you—"

"Stupid one, you surely never worked in a mine Blood must be left alone, it will congeal in a minute "

"Then let me bandage it at least," I said I untied my cerise sash and made him sit down and wound it around his head, it was soaked through even while I made it fast "Leave it on or you will mess yourself up some more," I said, and I thought It will be easier to find you among the others with this red bandage

"Thanks," he said "Give me an earring and a bottle of rum and I'll make a perfect pirate at a masquerade María ?"

"At your orders, señor "

"They are attacking us now from three sides, however, it seems quiet between here and our trenches along the Calle Belén I shall send you one of the grenadiers and he will take you women through our lines and to the Brothers of Belen It is a very short distance You won't be scared, even if a few rifles should crack ?"

"I think we women will be needed here," I said

"I am giving orders and no one else," he said "This is no place for women If we want tortillas tonight we can buy them at the corner "

"All right But I will stay "

"Damn you, woman," he said "Damn you, mujer, I can't have thee here I can't do my duty if I have my mind on thee "

"Forget me," I said and went with him from the kitchen "Don't think of me I shall be safe "

The bugles called on all sides, and because I was afraid to let him go I tried to make a joke "Listen," I said, "why do buglers always sound like young roosters ? Have you ever heard a bugle call that wouldn't break ?"

"Buglers are braver men than the rest," Felipe said, and he looked at me and his eyes said goodbye, and adiós, my love, and I asked "Why ?"

"Because buglers must have enough spit left to blow attack," he said, and turned and went away I knew what he meant

because my own mouth was filled with the sawdust of fear and sweat ran down on me like cold water and I thought I must not let myself tremble now, please, dear God in heaven, stop me from trembling

The grenadier came a few minutes later and Marfa said quietly that she had talked it over with the other women and that she herself and sixteen of them wished to remain in Granaditas Because they felt safer there, she said with a slow brown smile, and I understood that they, too, wanted to be near their men I went upstairs to make some preparations for the wounded At that time there were only five of them, those from the roof, because none had been brought in from the trenches yet One of them complained that the walls were coming down and the floor was coming up, and he kept miserably retching and vomiting although no injury was to be seen The others were bruised or bleeding, one had his arm smashed to splinters, and altogether they made very little noise in the corner of the large hall where I had installed them Or perhaps it only seemed quiet here against the raging din and roar of the attacks which were hurled, wave after wave, breaker after breaker, against the defences and the very walls of Granaditas It was like being on a ship in a storm, on a cliff against which the high surf was pounding What I saw when I looked out of the tall window above the gate were not people, human beings, insurgents, Mexicans It was a faceless, eyeless, senseless, merciless element Everything was motion, smoke, dust, hill and slope and street and lane irresistibly sliding down into the sting and smell of powder, down towards the bulwarks and trenches Scarlet prick of trumpets Immense cry and scream of rebellion Not people, certainly not men who had somewhere a wife and children and a hut and a small field of corn Whatever they had been before was dissipated in the tidal wave of the attack In that mass frenzy every identity was lost, and there could be no question of individual courage or fear either, because there were too many of them, and there was such a pressure of ten thousands and yet ten thousands surging down towards the cliff of Granaditas that those in front could no more have turned around than a breaker in a high surf may turn and roll back into the sea With their spears and sticks and lances and knives and machetes they were blindly stabbing and hacking and smashing ahead, and falling under the fire of the defenders and filling the trenches, and were crushed down

and trampled over by those who came behind them, wounding, and killing, and being wounded and killed, and piling upon top of those who had fallen before, and being buried under the onrush of those who were coming after, on and on, layer of dead covering layer, and still they were coming, too many of them, too many, too many Where the ditches had been there grew breastworks of flesh which the remnants of the defending troops used for cover, to duck behind, rest their rifles on, shoot their last rounds of ammunition They were still obeying their officers, those earth-brown little Mexican soldiers, two hundred against twenty thousand And what made them obey and fight against their own kin I do not understand to this day

The small, precise, and ever smaller staccato of salvos was silenced at last A few straggling shots, and the troops of Granaditas had exhausted their ammunition They had been forced from the roof before, now they had to give up the trenches The officers covered the retreat of their men with a whir and flurry of swords, with a gallant and almost elegant glitter in the yellow fumes in front of the gate Rapier against machete, pistol against Indian bow and arrow, the discipline of a dozen against the frenzy of thousands At last the remnants of the garrison were safely pulled back into Granaditas, and Lieutenant Riaño, who by some chemistry had distilled his grief into a grim and furious resolution, told the troops that all we had to do now was withstand the siege until reinforcements were sent from Guadalajara, León, and San Luis Potosí Granaditas has thick walls, a stout, well-guarded gate, we had a cistern full of water, and food enough to eat our fill for weeks and months And we had enough grenades to rout not one army but ten

Thirsty soldiers hung over the cistern and tore the pail from each other, wounded men were dragged up the stairway, and the noble sweep of it became slippery with blood Under the fine arcades men squatted down and emptied their bowels after the stress of fright, and in a corner of the gallery one of the kitchen girls was hanging to the neck of a soldier and stroking her cheek against his face, his arm, his tattered sleeve, and when he pushed her roughly against the wall I turned away so as not to watch them satisfy that sudden crazy hunger of the condemned flesh Young Riaño was leading his grenadiers to the upper story, they were carrying the powder-filled

quicksilver flasks, that strange invention of his which was to save Granaditas Felipe went past me with unseeing eyes, and so he was still alive I went back to my wounded men and did what I could for them, which was very little indeed The hall was filled by now with the din made by the Licenciado and his group, and in all the noise one of our wounded died quietly and seemed content with it And I myself had become part of that strange indifference of battle, when death becomes too common to have a meaning and life loses all validity

There came then an interum of complete chaos, when everything seemed to happen simultaneously, crazily, as the dreams of madmen might be The insurgents were concentrating their attack now against the gate, against that stout, heavy, nail-studded, indomitable door From the upper story young Riaño and his grenadiers began to hurl their grenades upon the assailants Crash and explosion, inhuman shriek of terror, spatter of iron fragments ricochetting against the walls, and, mingled with the choking smell of powder, the odour of burning hair and seared flesh Terrified, the insurgents swayed away from the door, and for a moment the world fell into an abyss of silence Strangely, as from another star where life was flowing on undisturbed, the bells of Belén struck four, and so the eternity of battle had begun only two hours ago Padre Septién murmured the Latin litany of his ritual over one of the wounded boys, another was crying loudly for Aurelia "Aurelia, I don't want to die ! Oh, all you Saints, don't let me die, Aurelia !" And then the assault against the door was taken up with a new fury, and the grenades rained down, some exploding and some smashing and killing the men down there by the sheer weight of the iron flasks

While Riaño and Major Berzábal continued to fight and slay and kill, the Licenciado Valdez was at the same time tying his white handkerchief to someone's sword and waving it out of the window as a frantic sign of surrender The insurgents down there in their hot pool of blood and fight and explosion received this obvious piece of Spanish trickery with a scream of rage, with a renewed, frenzied attempt at ramming that stubborn door Andreas Ruiz dragged a large, heavy leather pouch into the hall, this, then, was their perpetual panacea silver They began throwing money to the insurgents, as they had always thrown silver to appease the mob But those who were battering against the gate of Granaditas did not want pesos , they did

not want a pittance thrown to them Behind this stout, obstinate door they knew the fabulous wealth of the town stored away and they were going to get it The door sighed and chipped, but it held, and the grenades were still falling and dead insurgents were piling up before the gate Blood was flowing over the Plazuela and streaming down the steep street of Mendizabal, as water would stream down that slope in times of rain

And up this reddened street strange creatures were creeping now like giant turtles *cargadores*, the little men who had carried flagstones from the quarries all their lives and who now had loaded large slabs of stone upon their backs as a shield against Riaño's grenades Invulnerable beneath these stones, they reached the gate, and one of them kindled a flame with the resinous ocote sticks and lit a torch and stuck it under the door The splintered boards began to smoke, to turn black, here and there a little flame sprang up under the touch of the patient torch, and only when the gate was all afame did the stony turtle creep away, unharmed *Labor de sangre* The labour of blood "It's cheaper than mules," Felipe had once said No, it is not cheaper, I thought, not in the final reckoning Smoke rose black and bitter and the flames leaped up, blue, yellow, orange, until they had reached the flag above the burning door and the hot breath and choking smoke of the fire filled the hall

The Licenciado Valdez was kneeling in a corner, sobbing into the black lap of a priest A bugle was urgently calling from the patio, where Major Berzábal was assembling his men for a desperate last sortie Andreas Ruiz called loudly that he was not to be smoked out like a rat, by the wounds of Jesucristo, and rushed out to follow the bugle

My eyes were streaming with the bitter sting of the smoke, I could not see much, but I heard the dissipated soft crash of burning beams as the last of the gates of Granaditas came down Padre Septién had unfastened a small crucifix from a little niche in the wall above the huge table on which the papers and lists and maps began to curl up and rustle in the heat He kissed it and, clasping his hands about it, he went out into the fighting Padre Eusebio came in, carrying some slop in a wooden pail, his soutane tucked up around his thin old legs "Where shall we take them now?" I asked him "I can't let them cough and toss and choke themselves to death in the smoke" He looked from me over the row of wounded men and

back at me again with a smile I could not quite fathom "Find them a corner of the gallery," he said, "it'll soon be over now"

I went out on the gallery, which ran around the patio, to see where I might best put my sick soldiers All through the day I had been sustained by the necessity of doing some work, doing what was needed and urgent It was a merciful relief from myself, from my fears within and the horrors without Under the high vault of the doorway was the clang and clamour of a savage hand-to-hand fight This was the end of Major Berzábal's sortie and the end of Granaditas

I rubbed the water from my eyes which kept on streaming, and I looked down on something which might have been a battle painted by some master of the Renaissance, or a battle staged with an insufficient number of supers in a theatre It was theatrical, completely unnatural But this, perhaps, was the Spanish way to die a flamboyant and formalized spectacle to the last They call it *La Gloria* Perhaps making a show even of death made dying easier for them I hope so, oh, by the grace of their saint-studded Spanish heaven, I do hope so

There were only eight of them left and they were backing into the patio, step by step, fighting every inch of their retreat They had no time to load their pistols, or perhaps they were out of ammunition altogether But with their swords and with the butts of their pistols they did all the damage they could Felipe was still among them Andreas Ruiz too amazingly, he had had one more change of mind and come over from the side of the cowards to the side of the desperadoes Major Berzábal was at the head of his small troop, flanked left and right by two young officers, one carrying the flag of Spain, red and yellow, the other the standard of the regiment Still farther in front was Padre Septién, holding his crucifix aloft against the storming insurgents—and this, this priest and this gesture, I was sure I had seen on some painting before Maybe it was the cross, or some deep-seated Indian shyness on entering as splendid a place as this patio, but after the unbelieving fury of the attack, the crowd, which surged in across the crackling threshold and with swinging machetes and the blows of pickaxes and lances drove back our men, seemed almost restrained

The young officer who carried the standard fell first and then the one with the flag Berzábal grabbed the flag before it could be trampled to the ground He was clasping it to his chest in the crook of his left arm, fencing with his right Felipe and

Ruiz leaped to either side of him and covered his retreat into the utmost corner of the patio. Then, as if a fog had suddenly cleared, I saw for the first time that day, in the faceless inhuman mass of the insurgents, a face I knew "Domingo!" I yelled "Domingo!" There was a black mad minute of which I remember nothing except that I found myself halfway down the stairs, and there was in me some wild, shapeless idea that Domingo would protect Felipe if only he could be made to recognize his master. But Domingo saw nothing and recognized nothing, and it would not have made any difference if he had. There were a hundred thousand Domingos pressing on behind him, millions of Indios whom I could not comprehend and who could not comprehend me.

One of the six lances which pierced Major Berzábal's brave body was Domingo's. Felipe caught the flag from the falling commander, its soiled heavy damask blew across his face, and thus he shot his last bullet without aim. The insurgents were slowly pressing through the burning archway into the patio. I was under the arcades when I saw Felipe swaying towards me, he walked and smiled like a drunkard "I am—a bit dizzy," he said "Caralinda, you are here? Good Good" he said "Where are you? I can't see you—"

He was stumbling towards me. I received his weight and he slid down on me. We were behind a pillar, the insurgents had not got there yet, they were hopping and dancing and shrieking their triumph around the cistern in the centre of the patio. There was everything at once, not much thinking, but some instinct. The kitchen, the trap door. I began tugging at Felipe, but he was very heavy "You are bleeding a little," I said "Under your ear. It will coagulate." I held his head on my knees and pressed my hand against the cut where the machete had wounded him. The blood was spurting out, not worse than it had from the cut on his forehead, not quite so red, not quite so liquid. He moved his lips, he was still smiling "I can't hear you, I—— Felipe?" I asked loudly, I bent close over his face and I believe that he said once more "Good Bueno". He took my hand away from the cut—it was sticky with his blood—and in the unforgettable caress which was ours, he pressed my fingers over his eyes, I felt the pulse in his eyelids, slower, weaker, weaker, to his lips, to his heart, stay with me, dear heart, stay with me a little while yet. His hand slid down and mine remained there until there was no more beat.

against my palm As a child, in Klein Werra, I had found a robin, the lovely red feathers on its breast, the soft little round head, and I had picked it up full of joy, but it is dead, I had said, but it is dead, why is it dead, how can it be dead, why do robins die ?

Maria came from the kitchen, and when she saw me she rushed to me and stood there with her broad brown feet and she said "The poor señor, such a fine señor he was, the poor, poor señor !" A fist came down and a knife slid into her throat to the hilt and a savage voice was shouting "There you have your fine señor, and your poor señor, and there and there !" Then something fell on my skull and I was dead too

I came to and I was still dead and I was in hell I tried to move but it hurt too much and so I remained lying there, dead Whenever I opened my eyes I saw another piece of hell I saw them tear the body of Riaño from the altar and cut his fine gold-embroidered uniform to pieces and fight tooth and nail over the shreds of it And fling the naked body back and forth and spit on it and step on it and mutilate it with their knives and tie its hands and feet together and hang it on a pole like a slaughtered pig and carry it off with a raw song of triumph I saw them tear the fat little Italian jeweller from some hiding place upstairs and cut off his fingers with the rings on them, and when little Rinaldino cried, I saw how they grabbed the child and hurled him over the railing and into the patio as if he were another stone I saw them break open the storerooms, door after door, and out tumbled the wealth of the province, of the churches, of the government, of the despised masters I saw them go insane over the gold and silver, the jewelled chalices, the priests' monstrances and chasubles, the necklaces of someone's mistress, the jewels and brocades, all the possessions which had been exhibited on the balconies and in the processions of countless holidays I saw them tear the clothes and uniforms off the dead and kill the wounded to rob them I saw them pour out the flour and stuff their loot into the emptied sacks, and the flour soaked up the blood from the ground and became a dark, glistening, red dough I saw them, at last, turn against each other and fight over the loot and strut in lordly coats pulled over their rags, and with cocked hats on their hair full of vermin they limped ludicrously around in shoes and boots which they did not know how to wear And I saw them

tear from each other those stolen garments and I saw them beginning to kill all over, kill each other, until the naked, despoiled bodies were an inextricable tangle of limbs, the ivory of the Spanish skin and the mud colour of the Indios buried in the growing piles of flesh. And every time I opened my eyes I was deeper in hell, and alone.

The Insurrection Liberty and Justice for all We had danced in San Miguel and had read Montesquieu in Querétaro and had listened to Hidalgo in Dolores Where was Hidalgo and where had he been while all the horror had been committed in his name ? And was this what became of freedom when it fell into unlearned hands ?

The church bell called Rosary and a man on horseback appeared in the patio , he shot his pistol into the mob to make himself heard in all the killing, robbing madness "The powder magazine !" he yelled "The powder ! The Gachupines have laid a fuse to their powder magazine ! Granaditas is blowing up ! We're lost ! Holy Virgen of Guadalupe, we're lost !"

There was one more stampede, one more savage scramble, one more trampling over each other and out through the gash of the burned-down door and up the hill to escape the explosion and final destruction of Granaditas I did not move I was lying on the flagstones, alone with the dead and the ravaged, and but for the raving pain in my head, I was almost content It was all over and done with "Let it blow up," I said aloud, "let it blow up Good Good I am ready If this is what human beings can do to each other , this what they have done to each other through all the ages , this what they are doing today on the battlefields of the world , this what they will go on doing tomorrow and to all eternity let us blow up and be done with it Let this whole cursed, damnable, and condemned world go up in one good blast and let God make a new beginning if He be not too disgusted "

I waited but nothing happened And while I was ready and willing to die, the living creature in me took over and was thirsty I was so thirsty I paid no heed to my aching head and limbs and began to creep towards the cistern I was so thirsty that a drink of water seemed a bliss worth living for I was as thirsty as if I had invented thirst I crept forward and pulled myself up on the rim of the cistern and grabbed for the rope of the pail But when I bent dizzily over the well I saw that even down there the naked corpses were floating, ghastly pale in the

black water, and I fell back and remained lying there, staring up into the high, late sky

And up there, circling small and black, and wheeling down, and landing on the broken parapet of the stoned roof, and hanging there like black garlands and festoons, I saw the Zopilotes

That night the insurgents looted and sacked the town. They wrecked the mines, they burned the houses, they assaulted the women, they broke into every shop and store, they committed every excess and ravage and rapine that tradition seems to expect of conquerors

"They are drunk as swine," said La Rosaura. "You can't hear the houses tumble down for the din of bottles breaking and barrels cracking, you can't smell the fire for the odour of aguardiente, and not the aguardiente for the stink of urine and vomit. It's a bad joke to say that my whores were raped, but that is what happened to them, for there are limits to everything. I stuffed little Chinita full of manzanita leaves and still she can't stop bleeding, the poor little one. You will not believe me, but there was a twerp, not bigger than my little finger, who wanted to rape even me. But you mustn't move your poor battered head, Nenita, you must lie still."

They had bedded me down on the billiard table, because upstairs everything was soiled and pillaged, the doors torn from their hinges, and La Rosaura had herded all the girls into the room beneath the blue terrace. They were crouching on the floor, leaning their backs against the wall, a frightened and exhausted huddle. La Rosaura was sitting on a chair big enough for a monument, and in her inexhaustible lap she held Chinita as though she were a baby. At the window stood dark and bulky Bert Quaile, his hands clasped behind his back, his chin against his chest, and a red handkerchief tied over one eye. He was looking out over the despoiled town and seemed far away.

Later I learned that Hidalgo had sent him and a few other cool-headed men to Granaditas to take stock of everything, make lists, save whatever might be saved towards the financing of the insurgent army. Quaile had found me in the kitchen, where I was lying prostrate over the trap door, soaked with the water from a broken jar. I must have spilled over myself. Loro was saying "Amen" and "Amen" and "Amen" over me. But

how I had reached the kitchen and, carried in Bert Quaile's arms, had travelled from Granaditas on to La Rosaura's billiard table, I could never remember. It was a black interim in which I had returned from death into the world—however cruel—of the living.

"Bert," I said "They wrecked Mingo Creek I couldn't prevent it."

"They wrecked every goddamned mine and mill from here to Marfil," he said grimly, "the fools, the confounded fools. Now they'll go hungry. Now there won't be any work, nor food, nor anything. God damn them to hell for the mess they made of it."

"They won," I said feebly.

"They won a brawl, and in the process they lost their just cause. It will cost them months—years, maybe—to regain what they lost today."

"Where was Hidalgo?"

"Hidalgo is sitting at headquarters and holding his head. 'That's not what I wanted, Lord, you know this is not what I wanted,' he is moaning. Allende is cannoning all over town with a pistol in his hand and trying to turn his stark staring mad mob into an army once more. Why, why, why must every revolution begin with a bloody excess?"

"Why do women bleed on giving birth?" La Rosaura said back there in the shadow. Bert Quaile came to the table and bent over me. "Poor bright-head, does it hurt much? We had to shave your hair to wash out the nasty cut you got there." He patted me as though I were a horse rather than a woman. "Seems I am not meant to be a rich man," he said. "Every time I have scraped up enough money to go home something happens. But I have a good will to return to Pennsylvania now, come what may. Shall you mind a modest living?"

"Bert," I said, "Bert, I'm not in the mood to plan a wedding. What has happened today—?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Don't let's talk about it. Close your eyes. There."

"And last night. You don't know—?"

"Don't I? Well, maybe not. A simple man like me can't know everything. But I know that you need someone to take care of you, don't you?"

We had talked English, and among all the dark girls crouching around us we were alone. I caught his hand, to hold on to

something against the dizziness into which I was sinking
“What would I do without you, Bert ?” I said I had said it a hundred times

“Aye,” he said “That’s what I sometimes wonder What would you do ?”

“They’re coming back,” said La Rosaura

Quaile took his hand away from me “Never mind them,” he said, “never mind I’ll talk sense to them ”

They came, they were raving drunk, they wanted to have their pleasure with the costly whores who had always been the preserve of the señores They stumbled through the house and down the stairs and found the door and battered it in Quaile put himself between us and the mob , he was as wide and tall and big as the door and he had fists as heavy and methodical as the stampers and crushers at Mingo Creek But in the end they tore him to the ground and trampled across his body to get to La Rosaura’s girls And lying on the table, I was one of them and two men came at me and I did not care, I was too weak and I had seen too much and I did not care any longer La Rosaura shot, once, twice, from her double-barrelled pistol There was a howl and a stumbling retreat, a cursing, shouting, running, and rolling down the hill “The rabid dogs,” said La Rosaura, “the stinking coyotes ”

On the floor, left by the receding flood, lay Bert Quaile like a broken, twisted, huge piece of driftwood He was a good man, maybe the best man I have ever known

September 28, 1810 I shall never forget the day

EPILOGUE

FOUR O'CLOCK, and soon this fine, warm September afternoon will chill into an early dusk, the church clock of our village just struck the hour, five minutes later than the one in the steeple of St Jacob's in Weimar, whose sounds we can hear on a clear day like this, thin and distant, but full of dignity, and which, I suspect, is lagging another bit behind the livelier clocks of more progressive parts of the world.

The lovely quiet up here, deep and limpid. So deep that I can hear the midget of a sound with which a willow leaf sinks into the ground, the soft wingbeat of a bird high in the air, the small evensong of an autumn-tired cricket in the grass, and as I bend forward, a blue cloudlet of tiny butterflies swarms up from the urn in my angel's hand and I seem able to perceive even the inaudible conversation which makes their fine, feathery antennae tremble.

Twenty-seven years it is since I returned, heartsore and tired, from my wild pilgrimage of passion, and of all the oceans of living over which I had crossed I brought back not more than a few drops, an essence a bit of wisdom or resignation or, yes, I think I may best call it humility. The burden of believing myself important had been lifted from me and I had found myself when I found that I myself did not matter. I had learned that no human being is asked to do or bear more than is human, that the load is measured to our strength and the penance to our digressions.

Four graves along my road. My own grave in Helgenhausen Park, the cemetery of the Brothers of Belén, where, at the foot of Granaditas, Felipe was buried among the harvest of naked, mingled, and mangled victims of the bloody day. The small green site in the wreckage of Mingo Creek where we put Bert Quaile's hulking body to rest, without the Church's blessings or shelter, as befitted an infidel who had believed in God, in the Bible, and in Mr Jefferson. And the nameless little grave in the clay-baked earth at the rim of a ravine in Mexico where I had left the small, waxen form which was to have been my child.

A child of my own, a child of Felipe, the promise, the hope, the light, the star, the seed that had been planted in me during our last night. The tiny life within me that had prevented me from wanting to die when everything was dead "Woman, your fight is not over, it has only begun," Rosaura said to me "Don't act as though you were the only woman who ever lost her man. Don't make me think that you are a worse coward than the thousands of girls whose men have been killed. Why, if these battles for and against our independence last much longer, Mexico will have a population of widows only. And what is Mexico? A blot on the map! Look at Spain, look what happens in Russia, in Europe, look what men are doing to each other all over the world, and what women have to stand for! Surely you are not alone in this, and, being with child, you are better off than most. What are you ranting against, day and night? With whom is your quarrel? You shall be a mother and that's more than you ever were. Now pick yourself up and do something, I need your help, someone has to nurse Chinita while I shall go and forage for a scrap of food."

She shook and shamed me out of myself, she saw to it that my mind remained sane during the weeks when memories of Granaditas were yapping at me like a pack of rabid dogs. The battles between the insurgents and the loyal troops swayed back and forth and there was no end to the horrors which beset Guanajuato. Famine was squatting in the streets, and killing became a sport. And yet, in the wreck and ruin, I was going to have a child, and yet I slowly regained my health and strength.

"Nenita Linda, let's leave Guanajuato. Let's try to get to Sonora where my family lives on a ranch. This is no place for giving birth to a child," La Rosaura said again "Nor is it a place where I should care to run a respectable whorehouse. Let's gather up our skirts and go."

She meant it literally. With the juice of some wild nuts she pickled my skin to an Indian brown, she clad me in the rags and the shawl of the poor country girl. Another rag she wrapped around the head of Coco, whom she took along, not only as a support but as a harmless-looking cache of diamonds. And thus we set out on our journey through the perils of a wilderness void of law and filled with bandits, deserters, escaped criminals, guerrillas, and enraged, undisciplined soldiers.

"Poverty is a better protection than a regiment of dragoons," said Rosaura, and surely no poorer-looking women than the two of us could be seen anywhere on the stony mountain paths. A heavy, broad, dirty, barefooted Indio mother with her heavily pregnant, equally dirty and ragged daughter, we slipped in and out between patrols and posts and ambushes and barricaded villages. We walked as though we were invisible, we were too ugly to be raped, too poor to be robbed, too much a part of the landscape even to be noticed.

But on the seventh day I lost my child.

I do not like to remember that day and I seldom do. It was a hot day, and before us stretched the plains without an inch of shade or a drop of water and the air stood still as a wall. My feet were blistered from going barefoot and I lagged behind Rosaura, who was purposefully striding ahead. Once or twice she stopped and turned her head and called to me, and I tried to keep up with her, but at last I had to sit down on the hard-baked ground. Rosaura waited and came back to me at last and stood over me and shook her head.

"What ails you, Nenita? Do you want to get a sunstroke? On with you, *arree, mujer*!"

"I can't," I said. "I have pains."

"Pains? Where?"

"On my feet," I said. "And everywhere."

"Pues—you can't sit here for long even if I throw a nice, large shadow for you," she said. "Here, take Coco and lean on me. It won't be long. I can smell a ravine, I can smell water in the air, can't you? A lovely, deep ravine, full of shade and with a cool stream to hang our poor pampered little feet in, and perhaps we'll find some ripe sweet tunas or capulinines, you'll see, we'll make a real fiesta of it as soon as we reach that ravine."

She kept me going with her fairy tales, but the pains grew stronger and the horizon receded, and walk as we might, we never came closer to it. There were clouds in that relentless distance but no rain. Sun and no shade, thirst and no water. There was at last nothing but my pains. I knew them, I had been in such pains once before. They filled the world and tore my innards out of me. My unborn child that had been lustily rolling and kicking in my womb lay still and heavy as a rock. I stumbled on and on and all the time I was praying. "No, no, no, not this God, don't let it happen," I was praying, "this

child is the only thing I want, it's the only thing I have, don't take it away It isn't asking much, is it? Some women have a husband and a home and a dozen children, and I beg you for just this only child. It isn't just, it doesn't make sense, God, I am too weak and small for You to bear down on me with all your power You are the law and I am faulty, but that is how You made me and don't You see that You punished me enough? Felipe," I prayed in despair, "come and help us, Felipe, do something for your child, wherever you are, do something, speak to God—"

There appeared at last a darker stripe at the rim of the world, but I do not know much about the eternity it took us to reach it The last stretch Rosaura carried me more than I walked At the wayside there were a few shrubs and a mesquite tree, thorny and sparse and throwing a thin net of shade on the ground That was where, for the second time, Rosaura helped me to give birth to a dead child She had rolled up her shawl and put it as a pillow under my head, and when it was all over and lost I was lying there, completely spent and empty, and looked through the branches of that foreign tree into a hostile, empty, black sky After a while I heard the tantalizing sound of water bubbling over pebbles, and then a voice that softly called my name "Yes I am coming I am ready," I answered, because I thought that Felipe was calling me, or perhaps God, now that there was nothing left for me to do on earth

But it was not God who had called me, only Loro, sitting brightly and with a parrot's incomprehension but full of good intentions on a branch above La Rosaura came from the ravine with a gourd of water, she let me drink and she washed me of sweat and blood and she also washed the unbelievably small and complete body of the child before we buried it We had to bury it deep in the ground to make it safe from the roving coyotes I helped break and dig the clay, La Rosaura rolled rocks over it, and from the thorny mesquite branches we made a little cross, one of the many crosses along the roads of Mexico, a sign for those who passed to stop, pray, leave a flower or a pebble, so that the soul of the dead should not feel lonely

I remained flung out over the grave and after a while the world began to revolve around me, the universe to revolve around me, until I was revolving in it and with it I gave myself up to it and became smaller than a grain of dust All the

wild grief and defiance had run out of me, and in my own smallness there was a relief as if nothing could ever happen to me after this When it grew cool and the sun was setting La Rosaura touched my shoulder "Come, Nenita," she said softly "We must go on, we can't stay here overnight, it is too dangerous "

She helped me to my feet and when she saw that I was too weak to walk she lifted me up and swung me over her shoulders so that my weight rested on her neck and my legs and arms hung relaxed down the mountainside of her breasts "There," she said "That's how our shepherds carry a sick little lamb "

"Thank you, Rosaura," I said "And thank you again"

"*Por nada,*" she said "For nothing"

Such was the day when I had died once more and been reborn, and since that day which I don't care to remember, I knew that there was some order in all the apparent disorder and a law above the lawlessness of this world I knew that I would die without fear and be reborn again and again Don Lorenzo would have said that I had seen God

It was a very changed Clarinda, the one who returned to Weimar on a sunny noon-day of July 1813, a woman so different from the ignorant, superficial, genteel young creature who had run away a short eternity of thirteen years before that I had no apprehension about being recognized by anyone I had lost all my hair during an attack of fever while waiting for a ship's passage, the new crop had been slow in coming in, and when it finally began to grow again it was grey and stood in stubby, obstinate bristles around my skull, making it look like a patch of shady ground on which an inexperienced gardener had tried to sow summer grass My body was wasted, a skeleton tightly stuffed into someone's leathery skin, for even this skin did not seem my own, cured and pickled to a dry desert-yellow as the burning sun and the stinging winds and harsh snows of the Cordilleras had left it My few pockmarks had come very much to the fore and gave me a barbarous appearance, also, there was a weakness in my spine which caused me much pain, and my left shoulder twisted forward so that I was forced to walk on a cane La Rosaura's ebony cane, which she had given me as a souvenir and a parting gift Coco's head was still grinning undauntedly within the grip of my fingers, but he had given up his diamond-studded nose ring in payment for

my passage On my right shoulder Loro was perched, clutching to me with frantic claws and cursing softly in Spanish Yes, I looked every inch an old witch and needed no disguise—or so I believed

Since morning we had travelled through familiar country, remembered country, rather, and remembered in wrong proportions As to every traveller since Odysseus's time, everything seemed oddly dwarfed and shrunken, as though I were looking through the wrong end of a spyglass upon these fields and wooded slopes and the nestled villages and the winding, timid river which was only a streamlet and yet figured so romantically and stormily in much of Weimar's poetry And then the town itself came into view, still the same tight little country town and yet not quite the same, some of the walls and fortifications had been razed, and Weimar was spilling over into its green surroundings with the vine-covered cottages of people who loved nature—if only nature was well behaved and had a haircut every week The postilion lifted his shiny little brass cornet and blared out the same merry eight bars which had sounded so often into the stillness of my childhood The coach entered the gate and stopped there, and the passengers were herded into the guardhouse to have their papers inspected I had dropped long since my pompous title and was returning as a simple Madame Claire Pontignac Wachtmeister Merckel gave my passport a slight perusal and slipped it across the table to a limping French sergeant in a tight blue uniform coat, red sash, and tight soiled white pants, on my way I had met such veterans of Napoleon's Grande Armée at every station, they were the backwash of last winter's disastrous retreat from Russia

"Welcome home, Your Grace," said Wachtmeister Merckel without raising his eyes or his voice "And is Your Grace coming back for good or only passing through?"

"I—I have not made up my mind yet," I answered, startled out of my countenance by the unexpected inquiry By all accounts I was lying dead and buried in a grave in Helgenhausen Park But Wachtmeister Merckel quietly continued a conversation we had interrupted thirteen years ago

"Your Grace has changed a trifle, if I may take the liberty of saying so," he remarked politely "Écoutez-là, you don't have to fuss so much over that passport, Auguste," he said grandly to the French sergeant—and in his condescending tone

one could hear all the defeats the Grande Armée had recently suffered in Spain "I fully vouch for the lady And where does Your Grace intend to lodge at present?"

I gave in to authority "At the White Swan," I answered meekly as the deep-seated German submission to even the most inferior official came creeping back into my soul I fumbled in my pouch and fished out one of my last four silver taler "Here," I said, shoving it into his ink-stained claw, "and, listen, Merckel, you must promise me to forget that Madame Pontignac is someone you used to know long ago"

"At your orders," he answered, and I found the silver piece forced back into my palm, I had forgotten that a German Wachtmeister couldn't be bribed Still shaking his head, he aptly summed up the situation in the finest tradition of the Frauendor

"Proudly, with thousand masts, youth is sailing the oceans Quiet, on a salvaged boat, age returns to the shore Friedrich von Schiller," he said

The postilion blew his little brass horn, it echoed loudly under the tall arch of the gate, the coach bounced out into daylight and immediately into the deep hole in the cobblestones that had not been filled in all these years and so I was back in Weimar

For a long time I sat in my modest hotel room, with my hands clasped tightly in my lap, and wondered how to search for Babette without drawing too much of the town's insatiable curiosity upon myself I should have known better The clock of St Jacob's had hardly struck three when there was a rap on my door, an almost forgotten signal long, long, short, long It sounded as if my forsaken childhood were asking admittance There was some hard-breathing but well-mannered waiting outside until I called my feeble "Come in!"

"Your Grace—oh, Your Grace! You've come back at last, Your Grace!"

"Babette, Babette! You've become quite a woman!"

"Clarinda, my little Clarinda—but how thin you are!"

We drew apart and examined each other with a very feminine curiosity and shrewdness Babette laughed a little and shook her head, flinging a tiny, glittering tear off her lashes "If I were to lend you my petticoats now, you'd lose them, you poor little bundle of bones," she said "And what did you do to your hair? It's a holy mess!"

It felt good to have Babette scold me as if all these years had never been. Suddenly, after the first rush of emotions, I became sober and sensible "But how, in great heavens, did you find out I'm here?"

"Merkel told me. He had promised to let me know the moment you'd enter Weimar again. I was expecting you, see?"

"Expecting me? But how? Since when?"

"Since when! Now that's asking a silly question! Ever since you disappeared, of course!"

"Babette—not all these years?"

"It isn't my fault that it took you so long to come back, is it? Anyway, I was sure you'd come back sooner or later."

"But how's that? Wasn't I drowned, dead, and buried?"

"Indeed you were, and a prettier grave you couldn't have got even if you had been the Grand Duke's mother in person. But as for me, I didn't believe it, not for one hour. I just knew for sure that the girl they found in the millpond was not you, see?"

"Well—" I said in amazement.

"Well—I had lent you my own petticoats, hadn't I, and I myself had dressed you in them, hadn't I? One was red and one was pink and one was white with starched ruffles, if you remember. And that poor creature, God bless her soul, had a blue petticoat with blue-and-white chequered ruffles, naturally all in rags when they dragged her out of the water, and so I knew for sure it couldn't be you."

"And you didn't speak up? You didn't tell my—You didn't tell Count Driesen that he was mistaken?"

"Why should I? He was having the time of his life burying you and mourning over you. And I hoped you were having a high time of it, too. If you hadn't wanted to be buried you would have told him so yourself, that's what I figured. Was I right?"

"Thanks, Babette. So you are certain no one knows that I am alive?"

"Well—no. Of that I'm not so sure. There were rumours off and on. It seems someone couldn't keep his big mouth shut, this famous friend of yours, what's his name? Herr von Humboldt. He seems to have run into you somewhere and he dropped a little hint here and there. But much grass has grown over the old stories and most people forgot you. They

had more important things to think about in the meantime, what with all these wars and battles Naturally, there will be some noise and crackling when they learn that you're back, but that can't be helped "

"But that's exactly what I wish to avoid Nobody must know that I am here, that I am alive I am very tired, Babette I want to hide away somewhere in Klein Werra, or on one of the tenant farms, or in Father's old shooting box, and no one needs to know about it but my brother All I want is to be left in peace "

Babette opened her mouth and closed it again, three times, before she said gently "Your brother is dead, Clarinda, he died in the brain-fever epidemics we had here after the Battle of Jena in 1806 And there is no Klein Werra I'm sorry that I am the one to give you all the bad news Klein Werra was mortgaged to the rafters even before that, all timber cut, the cattle sold, and the French took the rest It was auctioned off after you had been gone for seven years and were legally declared dead Your sister-in-law went to Leipzig, they say, and married a wine merchant My God, your father's shooting box ! It burned down with a lot of other rubble "

"But the boys, my two nephews ?"

"Gone too Both died of the flux we got as our souvenir of the Battle of Jena You have no idea, Clarinda, how full the town was with filth and dirt and miasma when the troops left "

"It's all right, Babette I know how it must have been Don't think me callous if I don't cry But I found that there is some order in all of this " Yes, there is law and order in this, too, I thought, nobody left, then, of the Werras but my own fruitless self Old trees must fall and rot, old families must die out and make space for new blood And now, Clarinda ? I thought, where do we go from here ? I was tired, every last drop of my blood was tired, and four taler was all the fortune I had left I had a passing vision of the silver threshold over which Felipe had carried me into the Palacio Contreras Well, such thoughts were not much help now "The main thing is to keep Wachtmeister Merckel from trumpeting it all over town that I'm here," I said

"Leave that to me—he won't He is a snooping old gopher by profession, but I took him by his honour I gave him to understand that you are a secret delegate of the Prussians and

that you came here to help with the secret organization of some voluntary corps against Napoleon You're safe with Merckel as long as he thinks that you hate Napoleon as much as he does "

"No wonder Poor Weimar must have seen horrible things in 1806 "

Babette gave me her old little grin and her tongue came out and licked her upper lip in the old mischievous way "Well, we had a few fairly interesting days after the Battle of Jena," she said lightly "But you know how it goes in a war If people can't brag about their victories, they want to brag at least about their sufferings One town wants to have suffered more than the next, and Weimar hasn't stopped bragging and being sorry for herself ever since Reminds me always of my grandfather, who had a back tooth pulled and kept talking about it to the end of his days, if you listened to him, no man ever had a toothache as bad as his It had its funny side too The Prussians were still talking about how they would beat the French when the battle was already lost You should have seen them then ! They were running so fast the French didn't know how to catch up with them There was a bit of shooting in the streets, and even a few casualties, but the filthiness of the whole thing, that was the worst How people turned their coats ! How they switched from the beaten Prussians to the victorious French, oh my ! And the wonderfully heroic things our ladies did ! Why, our Duchess had no white bread for a whole day ! And while our great Goethe entertained some French general, his Mam'selle Vulpius defended his wine cellar against some drunk French soldiers so bravely that His Excellency set off the next day and made her his honest wife It was time, too, if you ask me "

"Well, well," I said as the old Weimar gossip lapped at my feet "And what did Frau von Stein think of that ?"

"The old rattlesnake, she did the mam'selle one better Hid a wounded Prussian general in her bed, made the poor devil crawl out of the window on a rope of sheets instead of giving himself up to Napoleon, as our Duke did Broke his bones and died the day after Frau von Stein is still proud of her gallant deed Ah yes, there was a great stir and cackle in the old henhouse "

She picked up my rough, freckled hand and studied it with a disgusted sigh before she returned to the Battle of Jena

"The more I have seen and heard of war, the less I understand it," she said "It simply makes no sense, Clarinda In 1806 the Prussians were our friends, but they didn't behave one hair better than the French, who were our enemies Suddenly the French became our allies and the Prussians stood against us Now did they change? Or did we? Or the French? Not a bit, believe me And lately there's some talk about Russians coming to liberate us from Napoleon's yoke Can you imagine that? Personally, I haven't felt the yoke yet Personally, I like the French soldiers best, but maybe I'm prejudiced on account of Jean "

"Jean? Is he—your sweetheart?"

"My husband," she said proudly "Jean Meunier I'm Madame Meunier He took me to Strasbourg once and now I'm a French *modiste*, if you can believe it!"

"Babette—you have a husband? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I *had* a husband," she said so quietly that I could have wept "He never came back from Russia Well, that's how it goes if one marries a soldier They say freezing is a pleasant death Well, I hope so It's only that Jean couldn't see his little boy any more, he was always dreaming up big dreams about his son who would take over the farm near Mulhouse some day, but all I got while he was alive was one girl after the other "

She kept on smiling, as if I were the one who needed solace, and only when I put her head against my shoulder and began rocking her in my arms as I had done in our childhood whenever she had received a spanking for my misdeeds, she permitted herself a few huge, soul-satisfying sobs, when she came up and out of it she was smiling, brighter than before "You'll like little Jean, he is a fine bundle of joy Eighteen months old this coming Monday And three girls, the oldest one is your godchild I named her Clarinda, whether you like it or not It's quite some responsibility to bring up four children without a father But," Babette said, perking up perceptibly, "but I guess I'll find myself another nice husband after a little time has passed, don't you think so? For the mother of four children, I don't look too old yet, do I? You see, my Jean came four times on furlough," she said I could tell that she had made this little joke often before and was still pleased with it Probably her Jean had made it first, and since he

hadn't come back from Russia the joke had become more and more wonderful to her as time went on

"Ah yes, Clarinda, you can praise yourself very lucky to have spent these years in parts of the world where they had no wars," she concluded

"Yes," I said "That's what everybody tells me" I heard the bars on the windows of La Rosaura's house splinter and saw once more the faces in the torchlight, saw them surge up like a sinister, crushing wave, saw that wave of human masks break over Bert Quaile's brave, hulking body, saw his head and his hands come up, once, twice, like those of a desperate swimmer, I saw the broad, filthy, dark-skinned feet trample over him, saw him left on the floor like an oddly shaped, twisted piece of driftwood, while the wave surged on and on towards me

"And you?" I heard Babette ask "How did you come by that French name of yours? Did you, perchance, marry a Frenchman too?"

"No In a way I'm still married to my—to Count Driesen, you know Or did he marry again after having me legally declared dead?"

"You should know him better than that He's having a fine time making a perpetual display of his loneliness and sorrow He'll never forgive you that he can't cheat himself any longer about it"

"That's one reason why I don't want him or anyone else to know about my being here He can't expect me to commit suicide just to spare his delicate feelings, can he?"

"No—but you could disappear again, incognito, the same as you arrived"

"I could, if I had the money to travel on and settle somewhere else"

"No money, eh?"

"No money No family No friends And not much strength left, Babette"

"And what about him—your man—that dashing Spanish grandee you ran away with? Did he desert you?"

"He is dead, Babette"

At this she sat silent for a little while and at last she said quietly "Well—then you know how it is"

"Yes I know"

"Maybe you don't want to talk about it? Or would it do you good?"

"He died in Mexico Like a man Fighting," I said, and I felt proud of a moment

"Fighting? For freedom?"

"No Against it," I answered, and my little pride toppled over What a confused, bloody world men had made for us women! Babette seemed to read my thoughts, for she touched my hand timidly and asked with unwonted seriousness "Do you believe, Your Grace, that there is such a thing as a wrong side and a right side?"

"No," I answered "Not before God"

At that moment Loro took over the conversation He had perched himself on the cornice which held the faded window drapery and had fallen asleep up there, now the sudden pause in our talk seemed to have awakened him and he came busily clambering down and waddling across the floor and hoisted himself up on my skirt with claws and little tugs of his beak, and with a great commotion and flapping of clipped green wings, until he landed safely on my shoulder

"For mercy's sake—and who would this be?" Babette cried, just as frightened as was the bird

"That's Loro," I introduced "He is hungry and the journey upset his nerves We have been on our way—oh, I don't know how long"

"The poor little beggar What does he eat?"

Plátano, I thought Guava, tuna, piña, zapote, papaya, mango, helote All Mexico was in the melody of those beautiful words and fruits In Mexico I had been homesick for strawberries, and now I was homesick for Mexico I had been a stranger there and had become a stranger here "I think a carrot would be nice—and perhaps a few grains of buckwheat," I said resignedly This was Weimar

"And you—when did *you* eat last?" Babette asked, angrily taking charge of me To this I had no answer "Never mind I'll take care of you Two pints of milk a day to plump you out and a new bonnet to cover those bean sprouts you're growing on your head, and you'll look like a self-respecting woman in no time"

"Not so fast, Babette I don't know yet whether I want to be or can be a self-respecting woman, ever again And I definitely can't afford two pints of milk a day"

"Don't talk rubbish, Clarinda," said Babette, and the old familiar sunrise of cheer filled every dimple of her round face "Now you'll come with me and we'll show this crazy bird of yours to the children and feed it all the carrots he can gobble up You do want to see little Jean and your godchild, don't you ? And I baked fresh bread this morning, and we'll break it in a bowl of buttermilk and sprinkle sugar and cinnamon over it, for this is a holiday for which I've waited a long time, and you always liked buttermilk As for tomorrow—tomorrow always takes care of itself, that much I learned "

Four months of success for Madame Meunier and Madame Pontignac, *Modistes de Paris* Four months of respite, four months to heal the sores of my soul and to blunt the bladelike sharpness of my memories

I had a bed which I shared with two of Babette's little girls, and the warmth of their small bodies filled me with a peculiar gladness I had a roof over my head and enough work to turn my mind away from the past Less and less frequent were the nights when Granaditas became a slaughterhouse, when the mob broke into La Rosaura's billiard room, when Bert Quaire died like a broken piece of driftwood on the dirty floor As for Felipe, he was never dead, not in my dreams and not in my waking hours And so, day by day, doing the simple things which the next hour demanded and the next yet, I recuperated I took care of Babette's children, and no doctor has ever devised a better medicine for a sick heart, I swept the floors and washed little Jean's napkins and cooked the simple meals while Babette was occupied in the shop

Soon after she had taken me in, there was so much to do in the store, so many ladies clamouring for new hats and bonnets, so many orders to fill and goods to be delivered, that I was promoted into that part of the living room which we called our workshop Babette had quick, dexterous fingers, but I had the better taste, and Madame Meunier and Madame Pontignac began to flourish

The tiny house stood in a rather poor part of the town, in a narrow, crooked lane behind the Toepfen-Markt, and Babette's customers had so far been recruited among the wives of the small storekeepers and artisans of the district All of a sudden we appeared to have been discovered by the ladies of fashion and our creations were seen at Court The modes of a period

are always a tiny mirror reflecting the political trends of the times, and during that summer and early autumn of 1813, as our ladies turned more and more away from the slender lines of the Empire, one might have deduced from the romantic, very Teutonic flaunting of feathers and puffed-up velvet garnish that the reign of Napoleon was nearing its end.

"I think I had a good idea when I copied that hat of Minerva's from the painting, there are three more orders for these Lukas Cranach hats," I said to Babette, feeding myself a permissible dose of self-praise.

"Don't let it go to your head, Clarinda. The ladies would buy our hats even if they looked like a wad of Jean's napkins after he has put his all into them," Babette answered in high spirits. "You know why they come to us, even though our street is paved with sheep dung instead of cobblestones? They come because they hope to get a glimpse of you, these curious nanny goats."

"What do they know about me? I never show myself in the store and never talk to anyone."

"Rumours travel on air, Clarinda. And has there ever anything at all happened in Weimar of which people would not have known?"

"Babette, look at me did you start these rumours yourself?" I asked sternly, and Babette turned her eyes at me, honest as spring water.

"If I did, it would only be for your own good. This is no place for you. I'd like to see you back in society where you belong."

"Society—I would loathe it! I am happy here, Babette. Please, please, let's keep the world from our door."

But the world came to our door, whether I liked it or not. The bell tinkled at all hours, announcing the visit of one of my former equals after the other. The *beau monde* of Weimar was beating a track to our door, and I could imagine the relish with which they were swapping their crisp little bits of nicely worded gossip. My cousin, the Montgolfière, appeared in the parade of curiosity, she still nursed an unfortunate penchant for orange-coloured headgear which made her face appear more purple and blotchier than ever. One after the other of the Duchess's (whom Napoleon had made a Grand Duchess) frumpy and exceedingly noble ladies-in-waiting swooped into the store. Frau Geheimde Rath von Goethe appeared, the

former Mam'selle Velpius of ill repute, vulgar, good-natured, a little too fat, and with a faint odour of wine on her breath Even Frau von Stein arrived, carried in a litter, a desiccated, mummified old woman, dressed in the young, flowing, angelic white of a Court debutante, she dripped noble sentiments and her mouth was puckered as if she had eaten nothing but lemons ever since Goethe had given up their strenuous platonic affair twenty-five years ago

However, it remained for a newcomer, and a commoner at that—Madame Johanna Schopenhauer—to break the ice She had no title, but she had a salon, the leading salon, where the *beaux esprits* congregated every Thursday Madame Schopenhauer was a self-assured, highly articulate and worldly woman, the owner of a soul still a shade more beautiful and apt at self-expression than the Weimar average Madame Schopenhauer was not content to let well enough alone, one nice day she insisted on trespassing through the curtain which separated the shop from the private realms of our work-and-living room and made a frontal attack I was sitting there with little Jean on my lap, feeding his meal mush into him, my big apron was amply spattered with meal mush, too, for little Jean thought it a wonderful joke to save some of it in his pouched squirrel cheeks and squirt it all out at me when I least expected it

"Do I have the pleasure with Madame Pontignac?" the unbidden visitor asked "Forgive my intruding into this lovely idyll I am Johanna Schopenhauer, a very stubborn woman, as you may have heard I promised myself to make your acquaintance, and as Mahomet won't come to the mountain—well, here I am" Babette was standing behind her, signalling frantically to me that she was innocent of this A green feather on Madame Schopenhauer's hat kept bobbing vigorously with every one of her movements, and my main impulse was to get a pin and fasten that ridiculous ornament tight

"Madame Pontignac," she went on, "you must surely be aware that you are the object of much speculation among my friends, many of whom claim to have been your friends also, in past times which you apparently do not wish to recall Of course everybody does respect your wish for anonymity and seclusion But if certain rumours are correct, there should be very much we have in common, very much indeed, which many of my friends are eager to discuss with you"

I do not know why my visitor's important and secretive introduction gave me the idea that Poor Albert had sent her to me as an energetic dove with the olive branch. But I was mistaken. The rumour that had brought Madame Schopenhauer to me was of a political nature. Like Wachtmeister Merckel, she believed that I had arrived as a secret agent and envoy of the Prussians, that, indeed, I might have bags of gold entrusted to me with which to raise and finance some regiments of volunteers against Napoleon. Babette grabbed little Jean and the meal mush and slammed out of the room, while I had great difficulties in convincing Madame Schopenhauer that I wanted no part or parcel of any conspiracy, ever again.

Ten minutes later I had seen Madame Schopenhauer to the door and Babette reappeared. She lit the lamp and took the bonnets on which we had to work under its cosy small yellow circle.

"Well?" she said after a silence, as if sensing the unrest. Madame Schopenhauer's visit had left in the room. "What did she want? Is anything the matter with you?"

"Did I ever tell you about the bullfights?" I asked. Babette bit off a thread and shook her head without looking at me.

"Just before the bull is let into the arena they stick a little barbed dart into him, that's to annoy him and put him on the alert. Later on, the banderilleros drill more of those barbed banderillas into his skin to make him fight."

"That's neither here nor there," Babette said. "What is it you are trying not to tell me?"

"It is precisely what Madame Schopenhauer did to me, she challenged me and stung me and stuck me full of little barbs which I can't shake off."

"In other words, she invited me to her house for the coming Thursday. She dared me, and that's one thing to which I could never submit, not even as a child, remember? She made me out a coward if I kept hiding myself, refusing to front Weimar. She made me feel silly. In other words, she made it impossible to say no to her invitation."

"I always thought her a bit of a fool, this Madame Schopenhauer, but this strikes me as a very reasonable thing she is doing."

"She told me, as an extra sop, that it would please Goethe to meet me at her house, he seems to be a regular guest at her Thursdays. I'd like to see him. But it will be an ordeal all the

same Well," I concluded with a tense little laugh, "I have gone through worse ordeals than being served for tea at Madame Schopenhauer's Thursday "

Yet for all my defiant talk, my spine felt weak when I entered that salon four days later, and I had to lean heavily on Coco for support To make things worse, the first person I discovered in the room was Herr von Humboldt, looking just as fiercely preoccupied and unkempt as when I had seen him last, he jumped up and kissed my hand, protesting with a keen smile that he was delighted to meet me here after having encountered me last in such an exotic place as Guanaxuato I felt trapped, obviously this meeting had been arranged so as to make it impossible for me to deny my identity and past Here I was confronted with the crown witness against Clarinda Countess Driesen, née von und zu der Werra, alias Princess Pontignac, at present Madame Pontignac, French *modiste*. And yet I was glad to keep Humboldt's hand in mine for another moment, holding on to it as to a last frail link between myself and Mexico Don Lorenzo, my patio in the pink Palacio Contreras, my purple vine, the shining never-never-again Humboldt had seen them and known of them, and now we stood as in the centre of a stage, with a ring of discreet curiosity pressing tightly around us However, if nothing else, the ladies of Weimar had sublimely good manners There was no sudden hush, no turning of heads, no obvious staring at me Madame Schopenhauer kept on an even flow of conversation, drawing me into it without any show of strain or effort "We are indeed fortunate to have two world travellers with us today," she said "I understand Madame Pontignac spent several years in the same parts of New Spain about which our friend Humboldt told us such intensely interesting things last Thursday " She introduced me, who definitely needed no introduction I knew most of these faces, I even knew much of the thoughts behind the genteel brows Also, I had made and garnished quite a number of the hats and bonnets on display Amid the conversational clatter of silver spoons on fine porcelain cups, the Montgolfière pulled me into a corner and blew a hot windy gust of confidences into my face "Cara, Carissima, how glad I am to have you with us again ! You know that I never believed in your suicide ? Ah, my dear, jealousy has sharp eyes, and I don't mind confessing now that I was very jealous when you snatched that handsome Count

away from me But, *a la guerre comme à la guerre*, eh ? Oh, my dear, we must have a long confidential talk, mustn't we ? Of course, you understand, I can't invite you officially to our house, my husband would not stand for that—well, you know how stuffy our men are ! But couldn't you come and see me under the pretext of delivering my new hat to me ? And what do you think of Poor Albert ? Doesn't he make a fool of himself, insisting on weeping over your grave, when everybody in town and even at Court fully well knows that you are alive ? Oh, my dear, my dear, I can't wait to have you tell me all about that mad love affair of yours I am afraid we all envied you when Humboldt told us how he had met you in Mexico and that you were still in love with that Spaniard ! Our men were scandalized, they understood so little about our souls, poor darlings But we women envied you for your gumption What have we got ? One childbed after the other, and constipation—Oh, and speaking of constipation here comes Excellenz von Goethe now !"

I had almost forgotten what a handsome figure of a man Goethe was, since I had seen him last he had lost weight, and the lines of his body and his much-aged face were cleaner defined and gave him the beauty of a statue, indeed, there was a stiffness in his attitude as though he were uneasily posing for his own Olympian monument He stopped for a second in the door, his wide, dark eyes gathering in the company which, at a discreet sign from Madame Schopenhauer, proceeded in their conversation as if they had not noticed the important guest Goethe, after waving his hand at Humboldt and bestowing a perfunctory and impersonal greeting on the rest, marched straight to a small drawing table near the window, where paper and crayons were in readiness for him He gazed at them morosely, and absently he picked up one of them and began aimlessly to throw a few thin contours upon the topmost sheet of the drawing pad In deference to the great man's wish for isolation an emphatic don't-let's-pay-any-attention-to-him filled the salon up to the ceiling Thank God, the conversation had also turned away from me and revolved by now around the piecemeal withdrawal of the French garrison, it was a portentous sign and indicated that Napoleon's conscriptions were scraping the bottom of the barrel But in this salon, as everywhere else in Europe, such matters were touched upon lightly, as no one dared to exhibit publicly his allegiance to one

side or the other, and the miasmas of distrust smothered every open expression of opinion Only when Madame Schopenhauer cleverly steered the conversation away from the ticklish subject and to the impending performance of *Essex* did the discussion become heated, and the voices rose Meanwhile I had withdrawn into a corner where I was half hidden by a drapery, as if I were still the shy young woman of the long-ago

Goethe lifted his head for a moment and seemed to fasten his glance on some point within himself and then he went on sketching "Come over to me, Clarinda," he said under his breath "It is for the sole purpose of welcoming you that I am here"

He winked at me, put down his crayon, got up, and casually drifted into the adjoining room, I gathered my breath, my countenance, my cane, picked up the pieces of myself and put them together as well as I could, gave up the sheltering drapery, and followed him obediently Although no one seemed to notice our exit, I knew that everybody did and that it would be tomorrow's talk of the town

"I hope you do not hold it against me that I sent you Madame Schopenhauer as my gracious envoy, Clarinda," Goethe said, taking my hand and pulling me down on a small sofa concealed from the company in the other room "But I wished to see you with my own eyes and talk to you in person Hearsay is such a poor substitute and mostly quite distorting And so you have come to roost at last Welcome, my little friend"

"Thank you, Your Excellency It makes me happy to find you in such good health and humour "

"Ah, let's spare the formalities and don't let's talk about my health, it is a sore subject. I want you to know that I am your devoted friend, never stopped being your friend, also, that I didn't believe for a single moment in the pretty legend of your death If there is anything I can do to make your return more pleasant— What makes you smile, dear child ?"

"Something you wrote somewhere 'Your kindness runs through my fingers like clear water' Thanks again, Herr von Goethe But I am well content "

"However—to return is not an easy matter I know it, child I returned myself once from a long, blissful journey into liberty "

His glance wandered away from me into the past, into the two-fold distance of time and space, into the happy Italy of his younger years, and then came back to rest on me with critical amusement

"Tell me, Clarinda and did you see the church whose bricks were mixed with wine and silver dust?"

"The Valenciana? Oh yes, I know it well, it is sheer beauty outside and crackling with too much wealth inside. It stands over the richest silver mine of the world, which, however, was sorely wrecked when I saw it last. But nothing and nobody can spoil the serenity of the landscape where the Valenciana stands. There are colours on those hills like those of an old tapestry, ochre and grey, amethyst at certain times of the year, Venetian velvet greens—"

"Come, come, tell me more, child, feed my curiosity. You must have seen so much—"

"I have seen all the bestiality of man," I said harshly. "I have seen the naked bodies of hundreds of men killed in a massacre," I said. "Oh yes, Your Excellency, I have seen much, too much."

Goethe's hand, which was still holding mine, grew suddenly cold, so swift and sensitive were his reactions to anything connected with death. "I had two honeybears," I said hastily, as though to appease a frightened child. "Two little clowns. But they died in a flood." And there it was again. One could not tell about Mexico without speaking about death. For that matter, one could not tell about life without speaking about death. I smiled at Goethe, but while I was still looking at his white hair, the beautiful forehead, the wide knowing eyes, I saw another face, different and yet of a suddenly revealed kinship. I shook my head, but that other face with the noble brow, the melancholy knowing eyes, the fine, almost feminine mouth remained floating before me, a stubborn ghost who did not want to be ignored.

"Did Baron Humboldt ever mention Hidalgo to you, Herr von Goethe?" I asked. Goethe seemed to leaf quickly through the thousand pages of his encyclopædic memory. "Hidalgo? No—I don't believe I ever heard that name," he answered, slightly discontent with himself. "And for what reason, pray, should my friend Humboldt have mentioned him?"

"I thought—if I were a writer, I should think that Hidalgo were the tragic hero according to every rule in the book. A

character broken by the discord within himself A destiny put in the wrong place He wanted to be a but all he left behind was destruction ”

“ And is he tall and dashing and handsome, your tragic hero ? ” Goethe said teasingly “ Would the jealous young actors kill each other over wanting to play the part of Hidalgo ? ”

“ Oh no, Your Excellency He was a man near his sixties, white-haired, simplicity in person He looked—he might have been a brother of yours He was the curate of a small Indian community, he was a kind person, he liked the poor natives, and he would have been content to improve their miserable lives But fate took him out of his circumscribed place and put him on a runaway horse He became the leader of Mexico’s fight for independence not by choice but by accident He was too much a man to be a true priest, and not enough of a man to be a soldier He was made a general over an army of eighty thousand, but he did not know as much about soldiering as a German drill sergeant He had behind him not a people but a mob He proclaimed a revolution, but he had neither plan nor programme, whatever he did he did not do by choice but because he was trapped into it, and the insurrection remained a bungling improvisation from its bloody beginning to its bitter end He could arouse his Indios to a pitch of fanaticism, but once they were aroused he could not restrain their savage thirst for blood and revenge He had greatness but no strength I wish I could make him come to life for you, Your Excellency In the first act, a quiet little priest in Dolores, teaching his Indios to plant wine, make pottery, cultivate silkworms But the Spanish merchants, anxious to preserve their monopolies, send officials who tear out the young plants by the roots, break the pots and jars, burn the mulberry shrubs That’s the first act of the tragedy I would show Hidalgo reading the great French writers who are anathema, show him when he has to defend himself against the prosecution of the Holy Inquisition That, and the conspiracy in which he becomes involved, are my second act In the third act I would show him in the patio of his small church where he is whipping his handful of Indios into a frenzy I would show him riding ahead of an undisciplined army of eighty thousand savages who carry the image of the Virgen as their badge and have no other arms but sticks and stones and arrows, who try to stop cannon balls

with their sombreros, and who have only one battle cry 'Death ! Death to the Spaniards !' I would show him at night, alone, horrified and in despair about the rivers of blood in which the country is drowning—this country he wanted to make free He cries, he prays, and he is broken not by outside forces but by his own soul which is too fine, too good, to see the fight through to the end This is the turning point in the tragedy of Hidalgo Up to this point his star ascended Now it begins to wane He has won battles, and that night, in my fourth act, he stands with his armies almost at the gates of the Capital, which must fall to him like a ripe fruit But he can't bear to witness and cause more bloodshed, more killing, more rapine, more of the ruthless debauches of war, he turns away, retreats with his army, and is defeated "

Goethe said nothing, he only looked at me questioningly, as though waiting for the conclusion "If Hidalgo had lived in Weimar," I said, "he would have been a man like you, Herr von Goethe He would have been a friend of the people, a good counsellor to his sovereign , he would have beautified the town, planted trees in the park, he would have lived with books, with the books he loved and with the new philosophies, he might even have dabbled with the stage Hidalgo would have been a happy and successful man in Weimar and perhaps he, too, would have worn a minister's green frock coat and a fine bright order on his chest But having been a Mexican and a Criollo——"

"Yes ? Proceed, Clarinda Having been a Mexican, what happened to your tragic hero ?"

"Having been a Mexican, he was deserted by his army, pursued by his opponents, apprehended and executed He left a confession of his guilt, addressed To All The World He died with the crucifix raised high in his hands and he left his country worse than it had been before His head was put in a cage and hangs from one corner of Granaditas, where his Indios committed their first excesses and won their first battle "

"And this, I assume, is where your fifth act ends, Clarinda Let the curtain fall over the horrid spectacle," Goethe said after a small silence of contemplation "If my dear friend Schiller were still alive he might have been able to write your Mexican tragedy Liberty, fraternity, equality—imposed by violence, no, it is not for me, I am a man of moderation, and I can write only what I have lived " He patted my hand and I kept

silent, I could almost watch him storing my report away in one of the little drawers of his mind When his gaze returned to me he was smiling "And your beautiful friend—tell me, did he sink his deep shaft and prove whatever it was he wanted to prove ?"

"No, Your Excellency, he tried, but he had to give up There was something in him that never let him finish what he began A creator of fragments—"

Goethe did not ask me whether Felipe was still alive, he always comprehended the unspoken word and respected invisible fences All he said was "I still have the minerals he gave me as a present, would you care to visit us and look at my collection ?"

"You are very kind, Herr von Goethe, you have made it already so much easier for me to face Weimar "

"That's agreed, then I'll send the carriage for you one of these days, I know for certain that my wife will be very happy to welcome you in our house "

I knew that this invitation had the power to re-establish and rehabilitate me in Weimar's society, but I was not sure whether I did not mind more than cherish the distinction His Excellency had bestowed on me He got up, taking my hand between his two with the politeness of a great personage used to putting a painless end to an interview I felt discharged for today, but he held me back for another minute, his glance resting thoughtfully on my flushed face and my twisted body "Have you been in Helgenhausen yet ?" he asked

"No I don't think I am wanted there "

"Perhaps not wanted But needed—yes Definitely, you are needed You'll cry when you see what happened to your lovely garden, Clarinda And aren't you curious to see your grave ?"

"Why should I be ? I have seen too many graves as it is "

"However, I believe that you should not fail to make a call at Helgenhausen Poor Albert has small talents for husbandry Look here, Clarinda, my tour of inspection of some of the Duke's farms will take me through Helgenhausen two weeks from now, will you give me the pleasure of accompanying me and accept me as your obedient guide and escort ?"

"Yes, Your Excellency Whatever you wish me to do," I said uneasily, and was dismissed

But two weeks later the first rumours of Napoleon's total defeat in a battle near Leipzig began to arrive in town, followed

and acknowledged at once by our new friends, the Cossacks of the Russian Emperor, who descended upon Weimar like a swarm of particularly voracious and noisome locusts

"I can't see that there is much difference whether we lose a battle or win a battle, soldiers are soldiers, and us simple people get it in the neck," said Babette, who was standing over the stove and stirring with a broomstick the potato soup which we were cooking in our laundry tub for eight Hungarian hussars who were billeted with us Madame Meunier and Madame Pontignac, *Modistes de Paris*, had been turned into an army camp, as was every other house in Weimar, and people began muttering that our liberators seemed just a trifle worse than our French oppressors had been, and that war made strange allies and bedfellows The Prussians seemed worse than the Austrians, the Hungarians worse than the Prussians, and the Russians worst of them all

There had been French troops in wild flight and foolhardy last resistance, Prussian regiments in hot pursuit, yelling Cossacks on horseback racing through the streets, Hungarian hussars and Austrian dragoons galloping on with drawn sabres, all church bells had rung alarm, storm, and victory, the town pipers had kept on sounding their maddening persistent signals from the towers, cannons had been fired over the roofs, skirmishes fought on market places and street corners, and at times the mess and muddle had been all but impenetrable When all the shouting of gloria victoria and the splendour and the celebration, when the meetings of kings and sovereigns, the parading and feasting and the drunkenness and debauch of victory had ebbed away, there came the quiet, cool sobering up the burial of dead soldiers, the bandaging of wounded ones, the reckoning of losses, the cleaning of our streets which the Russians had in all their Tartarian innocence used for cloacas, the exhaustion of all resources the hard task of reconstructing order out of the vast disorder of having won a war

And then, just after the noise had died down and a small part of the wreckage had been repaired, the struggling last of the four apocalyptic horsemen came riding over the lands an epidemic

On a pale late afternoon a wizened old man in a faded, frayed and pelerined coachman's coat appeared at our door and demanded to speak to me "Great mercy, if it isn't

our old Schindler ! I wonder what he may want," said Babette

"Begging your pardon, Your Grace, please, but I didn't know what else I should do, please," Schindler said, pulling his hoarse voice out of a swamp of bronchitic phlegm "Namely, there is not much time and nobody's out there to take care of him I told Mathes to sit on him till I come back, but God knows if he won't run away too, he's a bit off his head, is Mathes, but he had it in 1806, although some people say that does not mean a thing and you can catch it a second time Your Grace remembers Mathes, please ? One of the stablemen, with them pigs mostly, because he is not quite right in the head but strong as an ox Seeing that he is yelling for Your Grace all the time, I didn't know what else to do I left the calèche at the corner, on account of this lane being too narrow to turn into, begging your pardon, Your Grace——"

Schindler's nose was red and dripping, he smelt strongly of raw rye, and he kept scratching with an unsteady finger at a little splash of dry mud on the fuzzy top hat he held with great formality to his chest I tried to disentangle the triste message, remembering that Schindler had always been more articulate in his traffic with horses than with people

"You mean you want to take me in the calèche to Helgenhausen because the Count fell ill with a brain fever and is asking for me ? And everybody has run away but crazy Mathes, who had it before, and you are not sure if he won't get it a second time or that he won't run off also ? Is that it ?"

"Yes, Your Grace, that's the long and breadth of it And the master gone off his head, too, with a fever, and you have to sit on him every blessed minute, he struggles so, jumping out of bed and yelling for Your Grace all the time, please Dr Velsen come out twice and bleeds him for the congestion in his poor brain and shrugs his shoulders as if the master is a goner already I mean if he won't live he'll die at least in peace, bless his poor soul, if Your Grace can catch him in time "

"It'll take me half a minute to get my few things together, Schindler You were right to call for me I am glad you did," I said, and Schindler let out a huge sigh of relief, slammed his hat on, and dried his nose by rubbing it on his sleeve, where a crusty smudge had been formed by previous and constant application

"Look here, Babette," I said, breaking into the kitchen, "I am going to Helgenhausen to nurse my—to nurse the Count. He seems to be very ill Brain fever And he is asking for me "

"Asking for you, is His Grace ? Now that he doesn't know what he is saying he is asking for you, he didn't ask for you when you arrived here half starved and wholly bankrupt ! And you, scrambling to his bedside like the fool you are and gambling your own life away the moment he asks for you !"

"Don't work yourself into a lather," I said with a smile "I know you don't mean it and you know that I couldn't do otherwise In a few days I shall be back here "

"Oh no, you won't ! If you leave me alone with these paprika soldiers to go to that plagued house, I certainly will not allow you to come back and carry the sickness to my children If you go you may stay there, for all I care Now take your choice !"

I often wonder how lightly people speak of choice when there is no question of choosing at all, only a compelling drive in one direction Thirteen years before I had not chosen love and adventure, love had chosen me I did not choose duty and strict discipline now, I had been driven towards it for a long time, and the road back had been outlined for me on my life's map by forces over which I had no command I called for Loro, who merrily hopped on to my shoulder, gripped Coco's head in my left hand, and once more the familiar haunting and yet tingling thrill of change and departure and exodus ran through my body

"Let's go, Schindler," I said, "we want to arrive before nightfall "

"Yes, Your Grace," said Schindler "And before the master is dead, please "

Riding to Helgenhausen in the same calèche in which I had left, but now it looked battered and dilapidated, as though it had taken part in Napoleon's retreat from Moscow The harness was torn and stitched together with a reckless disregard for appearance, and the two nags were miserable skeletons, a high brown gelding, wind-broken and spavined, hitched with a pitifully small brown mare suffering from founder, and both of them with saddle sores on their withers and with mangy hair

"Great mercy, Schindler—aren't you ashamed ?"

"That's what the Cossacks left us Ashamed ? What does Your Grace think I am ? If it weren't a matter of life and death for the master I sure wouldn't be seen alive with them nags on the road "

I was sorry for old Schindler, because he had to carry the whole disgrace and decay of Helgenhausen in public, and because, in spite of it all, he sat with such a good straight coachman's back on the box and still carried the cockade with the Driesen colours on the frayed whip

For all the grass that has grown since over the barren sites , for all the neglected grounds recovered and all the fallow fields made to bear again , for all the leaf-sick orchards brought to fruit and the dead beehives filled with humming and honey and wax once more , for all the weed-eaten garden beds now flowering anew and the empty stalls now loud and merry with the stamping of horses and the lowing of cattle and the clinking of clean, shining pails at milking time , for all this rich, fertile new life that, after much work and patience and time, grew over the ruined Helgenhausen to which I returned that day , for all of it, I haven't forgotten one yard of the way back in all the twenty-seven years since

Twenty-seven years, half a lifetime in Helgenhausen, and yet all of them blurred in my mind, a faded print, a monotone melody, each day like the one before and the one after, as the days of lifelong prisoners are said to be Time lost its meaning for me during these years, and when I try to recall them they seem neither long nor short, neither happy nor unhappy, a shapeless, colourless ever-same Always Years without substance, like the time travellers have to spend waiting in a post station until the horses are changed , or like the time souls have to spend in purgatory before they are dispatched to their further destination Yes, that is a thought that visits me often and appeals to my simple mind that during these purgatory years of service to Poor Albert and his lands I am permitted to pay off some of my debts while I am still alive, so that I may arrive in the beyond fairly cleansed and prepared for whatever may come next One thing I know for certain one doesn't have to enter a convent to live as a nun, since the day I decided to remain in Helgenhausen I have lived in obedience, poverty, and chastity, and by offering up myself, disregarding discomfort, unpleasantness, and pain, I gained tranquillity and harmony

When I entered Poor Albert's sickroom a candle shed its sputtering light over the bed in which I had spent the tormenting nights of my young marriage, sharing it with a husband who had tired in vain to whip himself into copulating and begetting, tired over and over and failed again and again, who, at times, had blamed me and railed me and, yes, even beaten me, desperate and furious at my inexperienced tepidity which did not know how to assist his tired and exhausted blood, and who had at last given up in resentment the effort of being a husband and a father. In this bed with its threadbare hangings, generations of Driesen women had conceived their children and borne their children. They all had done their duty, all but I. Now it was my turn to do the little I was able to do for the Driesen family. I took off my shawl and bonnet, carried Loro into the adjoining room and warned him to be quiet, and then I quickly opened all the windows. The air was foul. The bed sheets were soiled beyond description, spattered with blood from the bleeding Dr Velsen had given Albert. The room, for all its sticky odours, lay cold and clammy in the November night, and no fire burned in the tiled baroque stove which in former years had often looked to me like a broad, boastfully pregnant woman. Albert's nightshirt, too, showed a brown pattern of dry blood, and someone had pulled his snuff-stained housecoat over it, probably at the onset of the fever, when violent chills had made him shake and shiver.

Now he was burning, his lips were cracked, almost black with dryness, and a line of arid froth framed his mouth under the thin, reddish-grey stubble that he had grown during his sickness. His fingers were restless and I did not like the way they were plucking at the covers. He did not recognize me at all, although his eyes were gazing at me, and followed me everywhere as soon as I left his bedside. He was talking incessantly, angrily, with the nervous, petulant, high-pitched voice which I remembered so well as one of the things which had driven me away. I bent down to his mouth and listened but couldn't detect any sense in the delirious babble. Schindler had remained standing at the door "Poetry," he said by way of explanation.

As for crazy Mathes, he had taken literally his orders to sit on the master, squarely and firmly he had placed himself upon Poor Albert's chest, adding his weight to that of the heavy

feather covers, he was singing to himself just as incessantly and senselessly as the delirious man beneath him babbled. It was grotesque, like one of the scenes Mr Hogarth had drawn of Bedlam.

"It's all right, Mathes," I said, "you may get up now. I shall take care of the master."

Mathes stopped singing and grinned at me. He turned his idiot's gaze towards Schindler, who seemed to be his only authority, the single interpreter between him and a bewildering, jumbled, halfwit's world.

"Eh?" he asked with his slack mouth. Schindler pointed a gnarled, rheumatic thumb at the door. "Yes," he answered. But the moment Mathes left his post, Albert threw off his covers with a shriek of delirious triumph and stumbled out of bed. Mathes leaped at him and pinned his arms back. Together they tumbled to the floor, panting and grunting, and it was then that Albert yelled my name, he yelled it feebly and desperately and furiously, three times, five times, ten times in succession. Schindler pulled Mathes away from him, scooped up the master, and carried him onto the bed again. "Been like this fully five days," he muttered. "He never been that strong when he was in his right mind." Now Albert was exhausted, a cold, sour-smelling sweat oozed from his pores and two large tears emerged from his eyes and dribbled slowly down into the stubble on his sunken cheeks.

It is true that up to that moment I had been repulsed by the stench of that sickbed, by the dirt and filth of that fever-eaten body and the miasmas which rose from his soiled limbs and clothes and sheets. But one second of pity washed all sickening revulsion away and sent me into action. It is pity's own small magic that it can blot out all ugliness, grow roses out of the wounds of martyrs, and make the saints heal the lepers' festering sores with a kiss. That was what Don Lorenzo had told me. I rolled up my sleeves and tied on my big apron. "Tell Mathes to carry me a pail of water, and hand me your bottle of rye, Schindler," I said. "It's in your right coat pocket."

"Your Grace going to be sick?" he asked, greatly perturbed, and only the emergency of the situation made him deliver up, however, reluctantly, his last solace. Mathes's eyes, too, followed the bottle greedily as it travelled from Schindler's hand into mine, and his Adam's apple gulped convulsively as

I poured the strong, clear liquid into the washbowl I pulled the covers off Albert's body, stripped him of all his clothes, and began rubbing his emaciated limbs with the spirits The sharp stinging smell seemed to bring him back from the yonder for a moment With a great effort he fastened his eyes on me, made a grimace with his cracked lips which I understood to be a smile, and with a deep sigh he murmured a name "Elizabeth," he murmured "Thank you, my saintly Elizabeth"

I might have expected that Poor Albert would call for some evasive absent female the moment I presented myself in the flesh at his bedside, but it took me by surprise all the same A moment later I comprehended that all his calling my name was only the continuation of an old quarrel which he had dragged with him into his delirium, and I had to grin at myself Aren't you wonderful, Clarinda? I thought The good Samaritan who had rushed to Poor Albert's bedside at his first call and who was even at this moment helping him to relieve his bowels, while the spiritual part of him, for ever at odds with his body, went on grateful flights to God-knows-what Elizabeth

An hour later I had succeeded in feeding Poor Albert a few spoonfuls of eggs beaten in port wine and he had, so far, kept the nourishment down Twice I had packed him from head to toe in cold wet sheets, a process Schindler watched with utter abhorrence, and the fever had gone down the least bit I had changed the linen and put wet compresses on Albert's head, and he had obediently swallowed the laudanum which, I hoped, would make him sleepy for a while His fingers were not plucking the covers any longer in their restless grasping for life, and his babbling had become a more relaxed whisper A fire was kindled in the broad stove and the air was light and clean now, sweet with the fragrance of burning wood, and pleasantly warm in spite of the open windows I had sent Schindler and Mathes to bed, not without promising the two last retainers of Helgenhausen I would call for them if the master were to die during the night I did not think he would

A little later there was a scrabbling at the door and I went over to open it My dog Diana came in, a very old lady, a bit stiff in the legs, a bit grey round the whiskers, a bit too thin round the ribs She made none of the fuss frequently described in almanacs and sentimental novelettes To this day I do not know whether she did recognize me, or whether she accepted it as the most natural thing that I was sitting in my

chair again, or if she was too old to care and had asked admittance only because the smell of the wood fire had told her where to find some warmth for her stiff legs. She sneezed twice and simply pattered past me to that expansively curved pregnant female of a stove. With a deep sigh of pleasure she stretched out before the open grate, turned round three times, and fell asleep, a glowing faggot pushed itself into place with a delicate whisper and a small spray of sparks, the two soughing pine trees before the windows rubbed their tops together with a fine sound, as of a fiddle which the fiddler has put down after having played his piece I had come home.

Albert moved in his sleep and I went quickly over, changed his compress, and examined him. Luckily he had neither thrown up nor soiled himself otherwise, so far.

'Well, well, I thought contentedly, we must be grateful for small favours.'

Charity begins with the bedpan, and nursing a very sick man back to life is not the angelic occupation our sentimental little story books make it out to be, just as gardening isn't done in a May-green little shepherdess's apron and with a dainty watering can, but by spading the ground four feet deep and not sparing the pitchfork and the dung. Just as love is nine parts heartbreak and mutual cruelty and fight and hard labour, against one part of rapture and moonlight serenades. Art, with its concepts of form and beauty and serene perfection, is one thing and life, fragmentary, disconnected, often ugly, always brutal, and altogether wonderful, is something else again. It was my fate—and this I began to realize only as an old woman—to fight my battles on the side of life against the art or artiness of Weimar, which, in my younger days, had meant the artiness of the entire period, almost of the entire world.

And so, snatching a little sleep or a little food here and there, I nursed Poor Albert through the dragging weeks of his illness; it was not an easy task, for Helgenhausen had sunk so deep in mire and decay that every smallest necessity had to be gained by hard work and hard fight.

We had to start from the bottom, and we were by no means the only ones. After the victory there came the great letdown, Europe was exhausted, like a woman after giving birth, and the people who for almost fifteen years had made Napoleon and

his armies responsible for anything that happened to them, be it good or bad, had to learn to take their lives and their welfare into their own unpractised hands There was much fierce talk about the yoke they had broken at last, but to me it seemed often that it was easier for my countrymen to live under a yoke than to carry their own responsibilities

Slowly and step by step—and very small steps they were at that—we worked ourselves out of the pit, slowly and with many a relapse did Albert come out of the fever But the strange thing was that I myself grew stronger and healthier during the bone-breaking weeks it took me to nurse him and his estate out of the worst I had no time to listen to my own little pains and aches, and I don't know of any better medicine than a daily dose of forgetting oneself

As in any marriage, there was much to be forgiven in ours, , and Albert, bless his heart, had to forgive more than the average husband But there is one thing he will never forgive me, namely, that by my innocently not having committed suicide I had ruined and made useless and slightly absurd the sixth and seventh stanzas of his epos, *The Hesperides*, those two stanzas which he had written after my disappearance, the two best stanzas of them all, the only ones in which the flood of ink was brightened by a few drops of blood and tears

I understand well that it is this deep-seated resentment that makes him play the noble martyr and the great soul when others are present, yet act the tyrant and inquisitor when we are alone He needs to annoy me and try to hurt me every two hours as a remedy for his unsure twisted self, just as he needs his drops and pills, and as I understand this and agree with the medicinal value of the little torments he thinks up for my daily chastisement, I neither mind nor feel them and thus both of us are fairly content

There is always the magic carpet of my memories to fly away on Sitting at Albert's bedside, or at the opposite end of the long dining table, or at his desk taking dictation, or walking with him in the park, feeding him, cajoling him, nursing him, living at his side in the proximity of an ageing married couple, I can always journey into the past, absent myself to another planet, while Albert believes me firmly fastened to his neat little torture rack

In all these years there has hardly been a day when I have failed to come to my grave My grave, I call it with a sense of

nnermost ownership I have almost forgotten that an unknown girl in a blue skirt is buried here To me it is the grave of Clarinda Driesen, of a foolish and shy young woman whom I knew long ago and who has been dead for all these many years For, truly, the woman I was then and the woman I am now are not the same I have been told that the Chinese people, when they grow old, buy themselves a coffin and derive tranquillity and solace from such an odd chattel Indeed it is a good thing for an old woman to look at her grave and get befriended with the thought of death I like to think of myself resting down there, some day, soon Resting From my folded hands shall grow spring violets and autumn crocuses, from my closed eyes forget-me-nots, and a hardy wild rose bush from my stilled heart—just as the old folk songs have it

There was a nice crowd here a little while ago, but all have left Goethe and his women, both Frau von Stein, who had many virtues, all of them detestable, and the Vulpius, who had none of them Schiller and Mozart and Beethoven and Byron, Fichte, and Kant, every one of the great men who made my time a great time, and all the women who inspired them Napoleon is dead, as are most of the generals who fought for and against him La Rosaura is dead, but my cousin, the Montgolfière, is still around, purple in the face, yet always one step ahead of the long-expected heart failure

And Poor Albert, sickish and useless, goes on spinning his thin thread of life and poetry, while Felipe had to leave when his blood was still running strong and hot and full of challenge I cannot grieve about his death because there was law and order in his being taken away as in everything else There is no other way to remain young but to die young But then, young people don't know how lovely getting old can be All the life is lived, all the pains are suffered, all the work is done, and nothing left to love, to hate, to pursue, or to fear

Sometimes there is an echo up here at my grave, and words, spoken long ago, come back to me "The stronger love is jealous—the better love is not," Goethe had said, "the best we may hope for is the deep calm in which to live and grow and gain against the world what she can't rob from us with fire and sword" And again "To make oneself bearable to a few is all the happiness we may expect" Soothing wisdom, moderation, and an Olympic smile I remember the last time Goethe accompanied me to my grave We stopped at the spring

yonder and he took the tin cup on its rusty chain, rinsed it with the trickling water, poured the clear liquid out on the mossy ground as a libation, and with a slightly ceremonious air, so characteristic of him, filled it again and lifted it as he cited a few lines from a poem of his

*"All of it give the gods, the unending ones,
To their favourites, whole
All of the joys, the unending ones,
All of the pains, the unending ones,
Whole "*

He handed me the cup and smiled down at me as I drank hesitantly from the muddy-tasting Helgenhausen water "You, Clarinda, are a favourite of the gods," he said

And again I can hear Felipe's voice *Te quiero, siempre, siempre*

What did you say, Loro ? Did I fall asleep for a few minutes ? Did I speak out loud in my dream ? Did I call out the name you and I remember so well ? The night in El Encanto when he bought you for me , that one unforgettable moment when I saw Orizaba and felt like a crystal goblet filled to the rim with the drink of love, so filled with happiness that I could not have held another single drop of it without spilling over, bursting, flying away, dying up and out of myself Felipe, oh, Felipe, Felipe !

Be quiet, silly bird, he cannot hear us where he is now But speak to me in his voice, bid me good night before I go back to the house to give Poor Albert his drops and pills, brew his camomile tea and bathe his knobby rheumatic feet, tie the rabbit skins around his withered loins, make him a poultice for his phlegmuc throat, and let him have the satisfaction of scolding at me which rocks him to sleep each evening, softer and better than any cradle song

"Véngase pajarito, vengase, come and sit on my shoulder and I'll carry you to your cage before I return to mine Come, come, friend Coco, give an old woman your support, let me lean on you as we go downhill Good night, my headless angel, until tomorrow "

Shall we make a detour through the orchard, Loro, and pick us the last strawberries before the fall of dusk ? Large sweet dark red strawberries, with a rich flavour as they only taste

after summer is over ? And eat them with the sweet cream of our own cows, chilled in our own dairy house, and break our own good bread with it ?

In the Bible it says "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering " Sometimes I think that the Lord has respect unto me, sometimes I can feel him smile at me and at my faulty being and at the simple things I have to offer him

For if it were not so, why would the Lord let the biggest and sweetest and richest crop of all Saxony Weimar grow in my own humble strawberry patch ?